

DOCTORAL THESIS

Through a mishandled archive

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Through a Mishandled Archive

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD

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University of Roehampton

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This volume is accompanied by a boxed artwork held at the Special Collections and Archives at the University of Roehampton Library and the Study Room of the Live Art Development Agency. Researchers interested in examining this object please contact archives@roehampton.ac.uk or info@thisisliveart.co.uk.

Abstract

This is a long story, written and unwritten histories with a twist, many thoughts – ceaselessly framed and unframed, thought and dispersed –, a dream, a puzzle, an experiment, a multivocal performative experiment with words.

Created alongside a year-long series of daily performance-installations in public space by Tara Fatehi Irani, this written experiment is the work of several voices from scattered times and different places.

“What remains after the fire?”, they ask. “What happens to dances and stories where material archives do not exist?”, they wonder. “How do we bring change little-by-little, again-and-again, repeating an action every day?”, they muse. “What is possible at the intersection of photography and liveness – in the past, today and in the future?”, they ponder.

In an interwoven mesh of histories, a time-travelling Arsonist offers their first-hand narrative of a pyromaniac researcher who destroys archives through millennia to discover other ways of archiving and engaging with archives. In a near future, a mythologist explores repetition, endurance and daily micro-activism through Shahrzād and her sister Dīnāzād of *A Thousand Tales*. An unfinished draft of a research on the alternative gesturality that emerges through engaging the bodies of the performer, passers-by and audiences is published here for the first time. And a future web-archaeologist discovers remnants of Instagram and Fatehi Irani’s archive in ruins of the digital world. These digital debris initiate several new artworks in the 22nd century.

In addition to their specific areas of research, these different voices are exploring how we think through, speak to and write beside an art practice. They practice ways in which creative and critical thinking, writing and making can develop alongside each other without undermining either creativity or criticality. These voices embrace the unfinished, the ambiguous, the fragmentary, the uncertain and the never-ending.

“Where is the end, when there is no end?”

“What is the conclusion when there is no conclusion?”

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My hope lies in the unexpected; [...]. My hope does not lie in that straight route, a monotonous and dismal method which newness has fled from the beginning; my hope is the interrupted path, broken, drawn at random at every halt, of the wasp, of the bee, of the fly in their flight.

Michel Serres, *Rome*, 71



**Someone Was,
Someone Was Not
(i.e. Once Upon a
Time)**

I can start by telling you that there are two small maps and a postcard made from *Lomentaria Articulata* seaweed – crimson red – in front of me on the wall. An empty tea cup touches my left hand. One pair of glasses on my nose, another on the desk. Not an inch or even a centimetre of free surface on the desk. I can also tell you that I see a red vehicle through the window and it's so sunny that now that I have looked out of the window I cannot see the surface of my writing anymore. Instead I see flares, flashes and glares, rainbow-coloured patches and floating yellow kidney beans turning into red. But if I start with all the above, it is a bit unfair to the reader. Because, first, and I only just noticed this, it gives an impression that there is an ongoing red theme (in the seaweed, the vehicle and the glares) which might signify something (blood perhaps). And secondly because no matter how significant these details, and many others, are to my writing at this moment – for example I need to fill up my tea cup and that's constantly on my mind – they probably don't matter that much to the reader. So perhaps I should start with something that we can all refer back to and say "it started with that so that must be important".

It all started – a long time ago now – when a friend of a friend told me about an art project called Mishandled Archive. The project was the work of an artist named Tara Fatehi Irani. The starting point of the project was that she made 365 performances on consecutive days dispersing photographs and documents from family archives. My first reaction to the work was "Weeeeeez, the commitment!!" – I had a long night. What I meant to say was that the details that went into the work, the many hours that were spent on the same task and the repetition of small gestures and how they accumulated through the year was impressive. Perhaps the best way of sharing these details is to let the artist herself describe the project.

It was the 12th of December. I received a phone call from two elderly women. I vaguely knew these women from Iran. They are two sisters and they prefer to be known by their combined initials ShaDi.

We used to live in the same area in west Tehran but I hadn't seen them since my teens. I always used to see them walking around the neighbourhood in their podiatrist recommended white jogging shoes. One of them had red hair and the other dyed black with white roots. I had never seen them not walking. The black hair one was always carrying a fresh *sangak* – that's a type of bread baked on hot small stones. It was like they were always coming from the bakery. The red hair sister always had a water bottle in her hand.

That day, December 12th, on the phone, the sisters talked to me for hours. They put me on speaker phone and were constantly interrupting each other to add some detail to what the other one was saying. They told me how they have been roaming in rivers and mountains, houses and streets, collecting and telling stories every day for a thousand nights! At first it was hard to follow their trail of thought. They jumped from the story of a preacher who died ninety years ago to how to make nettle crisps, then to a tailor who never saw a camel in the desert then to pepper marmalades, eucalyptus ovens and peep shows in Isfahan, ... They said they remember memories of all the people they have met on their travels. Memories those people themselves had forgotten. Their stories were mesmerising: mountains turning into cream, rivers running over apartments with kids floating on lilies, women turning into bumble bees for a day and fresh baghlava falling down like rain. But in a little while it became clear that in between all these magical mesmerising things they are actually telling me things that they really shouldn't be telling me. Confidential or personal information from people's memories of prisons, executions, love affairs, shootings, the Shah, war, secret religions, illegal immigration, legal migration, deception, Khomeini, syphilis, Winston Churchill. They spoke for over three hours. I was spellbound by their tales. But then suddenly, without a hint of a conclusion (Why have they called me? What did they want me to do?), they hung up, mid-story—and just like that they disappeared.

I was so bewitched by their stories I could not stop thinking about



On one of the research trips, Tehran, Iran.

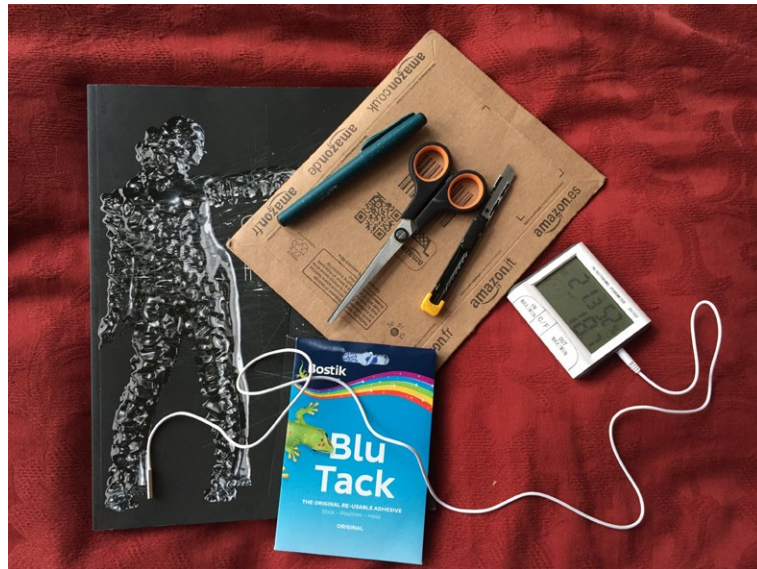


Photograph acquired in research, courtesy of MF.

them. I started searching for the people they were talking about. It wasn't easy to trace these people because they were mostly nobodies. But then one thing led to another and to another and to another. I eventually managed to trace their stories to people from Iran, Turkey, France, Cuba, Germany, the United States, Sweden and Honduras. I reached out to all the living contacts I could find and most of them allowed me to access their personal albums, envelopes, cabinets, boxes, drawers and folders in return for digitising their contents. After two years of research, I ended up with over 2000 pieces of photographs (from families, demolished photo studios, amateur photographers documenting street protest and other things), and also many more letters, correspondence from prison, receipts, newspaper clippings, legal documents, postcards, wills and obituaries.

In memory of the deceased please move five centimetres before you continue reading the next paragraph.

Even I was amazed with the amount of material I found. But I knew my task wasn't over. I couldn't imagine that collecting the material was the end of my work with these people and their stories. So I made another plan. To make copies of the documents and disseminate them in unexpected public places, somewhere they would feel out of place. In their out-of-placeness, the documents and the photographed



Mishandled Archive tools, London, January 2017.

people would seek and initiate new contacts. I called this process Mishandled Archive. Let me explain.

On the 1st of January 2017, I started Mishandled Archive with a year-long series of site-specific micro-performance-installations. Every day, I dispersed – meticulously dispersed – copies of the material I had collected in my research at a public place; one item a day. For 365 days, I carried an envelope full of these photographs or fragments of photographs and documents and each day left one of them in a street, park, plane, train, desert, mountain, ... wherever I happened to be, regardless of the weather. I took this envelope all around London and then to Glasgow, Liverpool, Tehran, Kashan, Kurdistan, Rome, Black Forest, Stuttgart, Zurich, Milan, Kiev and Hormoz to name a few.

I performed a small ritual before leaving the photograph/document every day. First, I took photos of where I was leaving the photograph: one close up and one of the wider landscape.

But it wasn't over. I also performed a dance: sometimes a complicated movement sequence, sometimes a simple gesture. On the back of the document, I wrote the description of the dance, a title, the location, the temperature (which I measured with a thermometer that I always carried), the series number and a message to the potential finder. I then left the site and the photograph. Though sometimes I lurked to see how people would react to it or whether they would even see it.



Close-up view, 'Insomniac', day 357/365 of Mishandled Archive.



Descriptions written in Farsi and English on the back of the photo for 'Insomniac', day 357/365 of Mishandled Archive.



Landscape view, 'Insomniac', day 357/365 of Mishandled Archive. The photograph can be spotted on the rock in bottom centre of image.

But it still wasn't over. I then posted one photo from that day's installation on Instagram along with all the accompanying text I had written (title, dance score, etc) as well as several hashtags – some I made up, e.g. #IfYouKillMyBrother, and some were meant to link the image to existing fields such as #LiveArt and #OneYearPerformance. Sometimes I would also find photos that other people who spotted the photograph had posted online.

I know that at least thirty-three pieces of the archive have found new homes with people who either spoke to me on site as I was making the piece or found it in my absence and wrote to me later.

Some of the finders wrote to me directly:

Dear Writer, I've found your message at rote fabrik and now I'm really curious to know more about your story.

Whilst walking through Dulwich/Sydenham woods we came across a photo scrolled in a tree bark. I am interested and intrigued as to what this is.

I picked up your photograph this morning at King's Cross and followed your project and stories on social media.

Well done, interesting! Let me know if you want it back.

As in, eight-handed chess. The reaching over and the watching. The attention, the 'being there', the leaning in.

I found this photo on the pier at Southbank yesterday! I was on the phone to my grandpa and then looked down and saw it peeking out. Thanks, it was a great surprise.

I also received a phone call from my local surgery who had intuitively found my phone number in their records through my email address:

- Hello. Is this Tara?
- Yes.
- It's Sue from the surgery.
- Hi Sue. How can I help? (or something like that)
- Did you leave a photo at the surgery?

In exchange for the time people took to write to me, call me or send me a photograph of where they are keeping the found photo, I told them stories about who the people in the photo they had found are, things I had heard from the two women with details I had discovered



Instagram post for 'Insomniac', day 357/365 of Mishandled Archive.



People present on site would take photographs of the archive photo. 'Insomniac', day 357/365 of Mishandled Archive.



Instagram post by a passer-by who later spotted the photograph of 'Insomniac', day 357/365 of Mishandled Archive.



Mishandled Archive tools after the 365 days.

myself. These are secrets between the finders and me. Several other pieces were taken by passers-by who did not write to me.

But it still wasn't over. At the end of the one year when I had made 365 of these works, I started presenting Mishandled Archive as a live performance and installation. These were different every time; made anew for each venue and its audience. Sometimes leaning more towards storytelling, sometimes more towards participatory dance, sometimes an emphasis on the audio-visual experience and sometimes a mix of all these.

But it still wasn't over. I started producing a book from the 365 days' work. The book started with 365 images and texts of my daily Instagram posts and was followed by a few responses from writers and artists who were invited to contribute ... but it still wasn't over.



Performance-installation of *Mishandled Archive*, Toynbee Studios, London, 2019. The rear of 'Insomniac' can be seen. Photographed by Jemima Yong

YZ

If you have resisted the urge to browse through the set of cards you have received alongside this volume and are waiting for a signal from me to tell you to look at them, this is a good time to pick them up and browse through them. To see them all would take a while but perhaps you can pick random numbers and look at those to get a feel of their development through the year. I can give you some random numbers if it helps:

2, 15, 25, 63, 121, 147, 165, 224, 256, 299, 321, 362.

Whenever you return from your browsing, I think we should ponder a bit over the title: *Mishandled Archive*. To think of what it means to call something an archive, and what it means to mishandle it. Perhaps, again, we should let the artist share their thoughts.

An archive actively creates new ways of thinking about
how we access our individual and collective experiences.

Pad.ma, '10 Theses on the Archive'¹

Mishandled Archive has been a process of defining both what an archive can be – what it means when we call something an archive – and what it means to mishandle it. Practices and theories of artists, scholars and collectives including Walid Raad and the Atlas Group, Susan Hiller, Emily Jacir, Rebecca Schneider and Pad.ma to name a few have inspired me in this process. I will reference some of their thoughts to demonstrate what *mishandled* and *archive* have come to mean for me during this process – keeping in consideration that both meanings are still open to change and development.

In the beginning of the project, I named my found photographs and documents an *archive* knowing that they do not fulfil many of the criteria that are conventionally assumed for an archive. Initially, the naming of these documents as an archive responded to the lack of archives and organised collections on the people and places portrayed in these documents. The collection, therefore, became an archive mainly through its name. Indeed, as Pad.ma put it, 'the naming of something as an archive is not the end, but the beginning of a debate'.² To name a collection or a cluster of items an archive is a decision to engage with the concept of archive as a place where the '*appositionality*' of things, to use Fred Moten's word, forms a creative force for cross-contaminations and new productions.³ This is not to expect, or encourage, the collection to substitute or imitate a state archive, corporate archive, or any other existing form of archives. To engage with the concept of archive is more a provocation of the creative and generative potential of archives rather than fixating on particular modes of archives and archiving. It is to understand the active force of archives in enabling the production and composition

1 Pad.ma, '10 Theses,' 353.

2 Pad.ma, '10 Theses,' 354.

3 Moten, 'In the Break,' 34. Moten describes '*appositionality*' as 'an almost hidden step (to the side and back) or gesture, a glance or glancing blow'.

of new knowledge rather than succumbing to existing circumspect relations with archives.

In their '10 Theses on the Archive', the collective Pad.ma remind us of a disjunction between the way historians and artists perceive archives. The former tend to view the archive as a receptacle of authentic knowledge and history which they, the historians, have to guard. The latter, the artists, in Pad.ma's broad reference to all art practices, respond to archives by retreating 'to a zone of blissful aesthetic transcendence'.¹ I believe there are exceptions to the approaches to archives within both of these disciplinary divisions. The artists mentioned earlier are only some examples of different approaches to archives and I hope that my practice is also such example.

My interpretation of archives is to see them as more than a source of rigid knowledge and authentic history fix in time (for example as image and text in the case of Mishandled Archive). I also don't approach the archive with a purely aesthetic transcendental connection that denies the archive any historical, social and political potency. Rather, I am more keen to explore how we can enter an archive with a proposal for reciprocal activation and inter-invigoration. To suggest we enter an archive, I should clarify, is not to hint that an archive only exists within a building or other spatial constraint. It is, rather, to view it as a *site* of thinking and sensing that we can inhabit. This inter-invigoration has allowed me and the archive to mutually have an impact on each other and has created a space for reciprocal activation, where rigorous knowledge and affect can intermingle. In this approach, *to feel* the archive is not separate from understanding and interpreting it – but also the affective potential of archives does not prevail at the expense of its socio-political significance.

Mishandling is the action I perform on the archive through the process of this project – it is therefore not an attribute of the original collection; although a case can be made for this particular archive having been always already mishandled. To mishandle, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, 'is to handle or treat badly, wrongly, or roughly; to ill-treat'. It is also, in an obsolete usage of the word, to 'use one's hands for a sinful purpose' – I envisage this sin as an

1 Pad.ma, '10 Theses,' 356.

invitation for cross-contamination between art and archives, past and future, bodies and objects.¹ Mishandling, in the sense that I use it, is a methodology through which an archive can be shared and opened to engagement. This is an active and positive process. It is a proposal for a different way of handling which may be seen as rough or poor but nonetheless is a way of caring for the archive. A form of care that questions what it means to give care. One that embraces the tear, the rain, the cold, the disappearance, the heat, the fold, the crumple and the erasure and makes new connections through these.

Mishandling is different from preservation and conservation although not in opposition to them. It does not undermine the values and benefits of preservation and conservation of archives throughout history. It is, however, against conservatism in our understanding of what an archive is, how it should behave and how we should behave towards it. Pad.ma remind us of a statement by Henri Langlois, founder of the Cinémathèque Française: ‘the best way to preserve film is to project it’.² Langlois offers an invitation to consumption that seems to go against the rules of archiving. With a similar attitude to Langlois, mishandling is an invitation to distribute an archive and bring it into circulation and consumption – regardless of the weather and the potential wear and tear. It is to use an archive in a continued observation of its decay rather than await its permanent recognition.

Mishandled Archive deploys an archival impulse as a creative force and a platform for making new connections – not in search of a conclusion or with the pretence of having a complete prescription for how to approach archives but rather embracing its own incomplete, paradoxical, fragmentary and often ambiguous nature. I can imagine a future where my definition of mishandling archives becomes a normalised form of handling it. A future where the concept of the archive is entwined with a creative potential as a point of *departure*, rather than *arrival*, and where distribution, dissemination and creative deployment are inseparable from archiving.³

1 Oxford English Dictionary, 3rd ed. (2002), s.v. ‘Mishandle,’ accessed August 30, 2019, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/119659>.

2 Pad.ma, ‘10 Theses,’ 354.

3 Monk, *Disassembling the Archive*, sec. Sunday, September 3, 2006. Philip Monk writes of archival photographs in the work of Fiona Tan as a place of departure.

To situate this work in an epistemological arena that relies upon the maintenance of belief in their transparencies would be an error of logic. It cannot be written otherwise. It is, therefore, written other-wise.

Jennifer Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text*¹

Following on from Fatehi Irani's point on approaching archives as a place of departure, this volume will take you on a journey whose point of departure is Mishandled Archive. Mishandled Archive is a multivocal project. I use the term *multivocal* both in the common sense of the word as being open to many interpretations as well as a less common – or perhaps incorrect – reading: that of being made up of several voices. The multivocal nature of the project has urged me to respond to it by curating a multivocal volume which is not only interpretable in multiple ways but is also constructed from multiple voices. To engage with these voices, you, the reader, will travel back and forth and aside between times and places. I will be your guide through this journey while you encounter writings by several others. Each of these others' unique encounters with Mishandled Archive, in material or conceptual form, opens up unexpected glimpses that would be impossible if this were a solely objective writing *about* Mishandled Archive.

In her introduction to *Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism*, Jane Rendell reminds us that feminist and post-colonial critics have brought to light the potentials of texts that employ multiple subject positions and voices as well as different genres and modes of writing.² Gloria Anzaldúa's writings and Jeanne Randolph's ficto-criticism

1 Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text*, 3.

2 Rendell, *Site-Writing*, 15-17.

are some examples of such practices.¹ Jennifer Bloomer's imaginative narratives, at the intersection of writing and architecture, are also a great example of the possibilities created by using different genres and disciplines in writing – narratives that are weaved in and out of myth, nursery rhymes, linguistics, autobiographical and personal anecdotes, as well as feminist and poststructuralist theory amongst others.² Iranian philosopher, Reza Negarestani, also uses multiple fictitious characters as a narrating device through whose voice he speaks.³ In other examples from feminist writings, the significance of autobiographical elements is paramount in the work of writers such as Carolyn Steedman, Susan Rubin Suleiman and Nancy K. Miller who each in their own way weave autobiography into critical writing.⁴

In the following pages, you will encounter multiple (mishandling) voices that enable a mixing of different genres and subject positions:

In her “indirect” lecture on Mishandled Archive, Anahid Ravanpoor, mythologist and Persian studies scholar, will – with the help of ShaDi, the women who told Fatehi Irani stories that shaped the first seeds of her project – take you *through* Mishandled Archive, into other literature and forms of storytelling to explore daily repetition, endurance and women's ways of creative resistance. For Ravanpoor, mishandling is a proposal for action – specifically micro-actions that will bring change without damage.

The ever-burning memoirs of the time-travelling Arsonist were discovered just in time for parts of them to be

1 See, e.g., Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*; Randolph, *Psychoanalysis and Synchronized Swimming*; and Randolph, *Out of Psychoanalysis*.

2 See Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text*.

3 For example, in Negarestani's theory-fiction book, *Cyclonopedia*, there are sections written by Kristen Atvanson, a young Scandinavian woman who travels to Istanbul to meet Negarestani, and archaeologist and researcher of the Middle East, Dr. Hamid Parsani. Both Atvanson and Parsani are creations of Negarestani and used as narrative devices to communicate philosophy.

4 See Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*; Steedman, *Past Tenses*; and Nancy K. Miller, *Getting Personal*.

published in this volume. The memoirs are documents of several experiments on disseminating archives through fire. The Arsonist lives under the mask of faces and bodies of others and in this multi-facial existence moves through history and time without ever revealing their true or whole identity, nature or objective. They write in a mixture of past and present tenses. There is no absolute past or present for a person who can travel back and forth (and forth and back) and in-between times. The Arsonist is living the relation between past and future and in a mishmash of fragments, side notes and inserts, is trying to capture all of these in the space of a notebook, on a page.¹ The Arsonist who has had no direct engagement with Mishandled Archive is speaking *to* the project and its mishandling mission. For the Arsonist, mishandling is not a methodology of total eradication – as it will become clear throughout this volume there is no such thing as total eradication but rather transformations. For them, *to mishandle* is to unlock the doors of the archive and to leave it unlocked – they literally do this when they burn the Fortress of Writing in Estakhr where sacred books are kept behind seven lock combinations. Although they engage with several theorists for whom fire, repression, death and trauma are all-time companions (Sigmund Freud, Cathy Caruth, Jacques Derrida and Shoshana Felman), the Arsonist proposes an ongoing methodology that can find hope and life in fire (and its companions) – a methodology that strives to make an impossible survival possible.

In the lead up to an exhibition on the centenary of Mishandled Archive in 2117, Wang Shu and a team of web-archaeologists including Malika and Chen, create a tour of their process of discovering and recreating the project. They excavate fragments of Mishandled

1 The Arsonist's memoirs remind me of the notebook of Iranian archaeologist, Dr. Hamid Parsani, the main character in Reza Negarestani's *Cyclonopedia*. 'Parsani's sole recovered notebook', writes Negarestani, 'is massively infested with personal notes and incomplete pieces' (Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia*, chap. Excursus I). The imagined writings and drawings of Parsani are of course different in nature to the Arsonist's real life stories.

Archive in the masses of ruins of the digital world and give a new name to the fragments they have discovered: #YouShallSeeBlood. Without knowing the original title of the project (Mishandled Archive) and through encountering its digital debris in undecipherable codes, they think *through* Mishandled Archive to face the tensions around digitisation as conservation. They also trace the environmental sensitivities related to preserving and mishandling archives and how #YouShallSeeBlood engages with those issues.

Abiodun Tagoe has offered a draft of an unpublished essay that tries to think *with* Mishandled Archive. Tagoe looks at the alternative gesturality that Mishandled Archive suggests through engaging the bodies of the performer, passers-by in public space and audiences in performances. Priya Esavi and Clotilde Pons happened to pass *by* Mishandled Archive; Pons in the presence of the artist, and Esavi after the act. For this volume, they were invited to recall details of their encounters with pieces of Mishandled Archive on the streets of London; details that would escape others not present. Their short responses invoke images, sites and memories that in their own way continue the inter-, or perhaps intra-, invigoration of archive, artist, artwork and audience proposed by Mishandled Archive.

Jane Rendell discusses how criticism is *located* in relation to art through exploring prepositions that relate art and criticism spatially. Citing the work of feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray who inserted 'to' into 'I love you' therefore turning it into 'I love to you' and creating a reciprocal connection between I and you, as well as the discussions of cultural critic Irit Rogoff on the work of artist, film-maker and theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha, Rendell reminds us of the shift away from writing or speaking *about* art to speaking *to* and *with* art. Positions of *to* and *with* remove the hierarchical relations between critic and artwork and engage (with) them on an equivalent

basis.¹ The same can be said for the preposition ‘beside’ as suggested by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.² The prepositions that relate each piece of text in this volume to Mishandled Archive, all emphasised in the previous paragraphs, suggest a mode of criticality that is situated in a non-hierarchical relationship to the artwork. This volume is therefore moving away from analysing by writing *about* Mishandled Archive, and instead offers a critique by moving *through*, thinking *with*, speaking *to*, thinking *through*, passing *by* and sitting *beside* Mishandled Archive. Irit Rogoff reminds us of the move from criticism to critique to criticality:

From finding fault, to examining the underlying assumptions that might allow something to appear as a convincing logic, to operating from an uncertain ground which, while building on critique, wants nevertheless to inhabit culture in a relation other than one of critical analysis.³

This approach, instead of viewing the artwork from above, works beside it in a process of criticality that operates from an *uncertain ground*. Trinh T. Minh-ha echoes this notion, suggesting a move away from the authoritarian ‘well-behaved, steeped-in-convention-language of “clarity”’.⁴ She writes:

Clarity is a means of subjection, a quality both of official, taught language and of correct writing, two old mates of power: together they flow, together they flower, vertically, to impose an order.⁵

Trinh T. Minh-ha writes of the premises of the clear and correct writing that is reduced to a ‘mere vehicle of

1 Rendell, *Site-Writing*, 6-7.

2 Kosofsky-Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 8.

3 Rogoff, ‘What is a theorist,’ 99.

4 Minh-ha, *Woman, Native Other*, 16.

5 Minh-ha, 17.

thought' and used to 'send out an unambiguous message':

To use the language well, says the voice of
literacy, cherish its classic form. Do not
choose the offbeat at the cost of clarity.
Obscurity is an imposition on the reader.
True, but beware when you cross railroad
tracks for one train may hide another train.¹

Following Trinh T. Minh-ha's suspicion towards clarity in writing, and in response to the ambiguity in the histories of the photographed people of *Mishandled Archive*, this volume welcomes the offbeat and aims to 'shift from the norms of the clearly written (correct behavior) to those of the well written (patient apprenticeship)'.² This volume aims to offer a patient non-authoritarian criticality which is at times inevitably obscure. This criticality is also aware of the performativity of critique as Rogoff notes elsewhere:

Instead of "criticism" being an act of judgment addressed to a clear-cut object of criticism, we now recognize not just our own imbrication in the object or the cultural moment but also the performative nature of any action or stance we might be taking in relation to it. Now we think of all of these practices as linked in a complex process of knowledge production instead of the earlier separation into creativity and criticism, production and application.³

The critical task is not separate from the creative. Performance criticism is also not separate from performativity. My approach in this volume is to move away from the separation of criticality from creativity and performativity and allow them to flourish *together, with, by, beside* and *through* each other.

1 Minh-ha, 16.

2 Minh-ha, *Woman, Native Other*, 17.

3 Rogoff, 'What is a Theorist,' 97-98.

The creative-critical methodology of this volume is a methodology of invitation and proposal rather than definiteness and conclusion or, as PA Skantze would put it, ‘a methodology of suggestion rather than argument’.¹ The choice of writers for this volume as well as my arrangement of their works in a fluid non-linear way, which I will discuss shortly, confidently step into the uncertain ground of criticality that Rogoff writes of – not confident of a final result, argument or conclusion but confident of the potentials of embracing uncertainty and ambiguity in order to touch otherwise inaccessible intricacies.

The passion with which each of the fragments in this volume has been written and arranged is shared amongst all its writers. A passion for a writing that is curious, adventurous, creative, critical, citational, exploratory and rigorous. The process of knowledge production, to return to Rogoff, happens at the meeting point of all these. In all of these writings, *Mishandled Archive*, has been a mode of thinking and an approach rather than a destination already arrived at, one ready and begging to be criticised. This approach can go in many directions – as did the 365 pieces – and it will do so through the several voices that will lead the discussion through what Skantze would call ‘a methodology of narrative care’.²

I have been highly conscious of the different implications of arranging the voices in this volume and how they would react to one another in the overall space of the object you are currently holding as well as in relation to the different visual and performative iterations of *Mishandled Archive*. In keeping with the ethos of the 365 pieces, this volume follows a fragmentary form. We will move from fragments of writings by one author to another and another and back to people we have heard from before. In the course of the 365 pieces, Fatehi Irani frequented some locations and areas more than others.

1 Skantze, *Itinerant Spectator*, 7.

2 Skantze, *Itinerant Spectator*, 8.

There were other locations that she visited only once during the course of the year. I shall follow a similar trajectory in arranging the work of the various writers in this volume with the hope that their voices shall ‘thrive in concert’ – as Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez put it.¹ This is another response to the spatial/geographical qualities of the 365 pieces of *Mishandled Archive* and their rhizomatic growth throughout the year. We will frequently return to the memoirs of the Arsonist, Anahid Ravanpoor’s lecture and Wang Shu’s *Multiple Reality Experience*. Other voices, we will encounter once. Aside from the at times evident relation between the works of different writers, the *appositionality* of the different voices, is crucial to the proposals of this volume. Arranging these voices side by side and in a non-linear way creates new imbrications that are open to ‘a boundless universe of potential connectivity’ and lead to interpretations otherwise impossible.² Through a long course of research, this fluid fragmentary form has proved to be the only way in which one can follow *Mishandled Archive* from a site-specific series of 365 performances into a thinking practice that happens in writing and on the page. *Mishandled Archive*, to echo Jennifer Bloomer’s words, ‘cannot be written otherwise. It is, therefore, written other-wise’.³

This volume approaches *Mishandled Archive* through imaginative narratives. All writers weave together personal experiences, fiction, myth, dreams and theories of photography, dance, archiving, feminism and Black studies to name a few. The volume also draws on the methodology of ongoing micro-actions that will be discussed in detail by Anahid Ravanpoor and in relation to the feminine resistance and storytelling of Shahrzād of the *Thousand and One Nights*. As with Shahrzād’s thousand (and one) nights of storytelling, the Arsonist’s

1 DeFrantz and Gonzalez, *Black Performance Theory*, 11.

2 Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text*, 7.

3 Bloomer, 3.

centuries-long memoirs and Anahid Ravanpoor's lecture seem infinite and never-ending. But who can argue against the never-ending path of fire in the archive? Or the path of women to make change through persistent small actions? This volume accepts the inevitable continuity in the mission of the Arsonist, Shahrzād and Mishandled Archive and sets aside a pretence of, in Marco Pustianaz words, a 'fantasy of closure'.¹ There is no end to this, I have come to accept and I recommend that you, the reader, also accept this. This ongoing repetition of small actions and the lack of a closure also reflects the "it still wasn't over" ethos of Mishandled Archive where the archive is continuously transformed into one form and another – 365 installations, dances, temperatures, texts, encounters, Instagram posts, live performance, lectures, articles, book.

The design and composition of the text and how each page is placed and viewed next to the other are also significant here. As we move along, the logic of the composition will unfold in practice and make way for glimpses and touches between the fragments. Rather than confusing the reader, the changes of our path from one writer to another, aim to further illuminate the potentials of unexpected encounters. Encounters that started in the 365 pieces of Mishandled Archive and now continue amongst the writers of this volume – none of whom knew each other in real life.

I will be present throughout the volume – in the beginning to help you get acquainted with each of the writers and later – when I expect you to be familiar with the way things are done – to offer comments, relevant discourses and additional information. You will notice my presence from my initials: YZ. Footnotes that are my additions will also be marked with my initials. And one last thing, before we move on: if you ever feel a bit lost

1 Palladini and Pustianaz, *Lexicon*, 14.

as you go further into the volume, don't panic, it won't last long. And don't forget that I am with you through this journey – always holding your hand as we step forth, back, aside, above, around ...

dance: I sit on the ground, put my left hand on the ground. Close my eyes, breathe. Open eyes after counting to 34 or 365 (or any number you can relate to) look around. Feel the ground.

It's not over

A bit stressed

A bit lost

'And You'll Feed the Trees'

Mishandled Archive, day 365/365.



A Thousand (disappeared?) Tales

Repetition, endurance, persistence, labour, the everyday, every day – I am drawn to these through Mishandled Archive: its daily repetitions (themselves acts of labour) and their connection to the everyday as the site and time of (extra)ordinary life.

Repetition, endurance, persistence, labour, the everyday, every day – we will explore these through the lens of a lecture on Mishandled Archive titled ‘Little by Little, Again and Again’ by Anahid Ravanpoor. Ravanpoor indirectly engages with Mishandled Archive in the presence of a live audience at the School of Oriental Studies (SOS) in London, 2027. What is offered for you here is a transcript of the lecture. Ravanpoor offers a fresh coming together of repetition, endurance, persistence, labour, the everyday, every day – through an old, perhaps even overused, prism of Shahrzād – the storyteller of the *Thousand and One Nights*.

Repetition, endurance, persistence, labour, the everyday, every day. I am interested in the everyday as the site of repetition and *passage* (between kitchens, bedrooms, streets, parks, libraries, buses, swimming pools, community centres, toilets, cinemas, court houses and trains). Passages that although worn out by our repeated passing, still go invisible and unmarked. ‘Little by Little, Again and Again’ looks at the stories that Shahrzād tells from the *passages*. Stories that were told, heard and remembered in the narrow passageways between buildings or within a building (of the king’s palace, let’s say). These stories relate to *passage* in another sense as well: they were told and heard, in other words transferred and possibly transformed, in *passing*. They are whispered and misheard. None of them are set in stone. They circulate, they repeat, therefore they exist. In this circulation and dispersal they become the material of Shahrzād’s *micro-activism*, the term that Ravanpoor is keen to use regarding the work of Shahrzād (and I presume Mishandled Archive).

Micro-activism allows a *minority subject*, though Ravanpoor – consciously I believe – never uses this term, to survive different modes of domination. The daily repetitions and everyday labour allow Shahrzād (and artists creating in her style) to work with/resist oppression. The oppression which might be from a semi-fictional king, a modern authoritarian political regime, a market-driven literary or creative scene or the dominant culture that pre-identifies subjects with modes of being and making. Ravanpoor never cites the works of Jose Muñoz, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga or Judith Butler, but there are certain links between their approaches which may well be unintentional on behalf of Ravanpoor. I am particularly thinking of Muñoz’s theory of ‘disidentification’ but I imagine that if Ravanpoor were here she would find it difficult to identify herself and her work with disidentification.¹ Or perhaps she would disidentify with disidentification which is not necessarily in contrast to the essence of disidentification.

Ravanpoor discusses how the creative strategy developed by Shahrzād in collaboration with her sister Dīnāzād and the multiple unknown itinerant storytellers or writers who have left their mark on her and her stories is used by artists and writers from minority backgrounds. In the context that the lecture is given, it is not hard to decipher that Fatehi Irani’s *Mishandled Archive* is also, for Ravanpoor, a continuation or reiteration of Shahrzād’s creative methods. Through a dominantly ethnic categorisation, Fatehi Irani and her work, at the time of making, are sign posted with: woman, brown, Middle Eastern, immigrant, Muslim. Categories whose

1 Writing specifically through the performance works of queer artists of colour – but allowing the discussion to expand to other minority subjects – Muñoz’s theory of disidentification explores how artists from minority backgrounds are challenging the ‘phobic energies’ of dominant culture that push minority subjects into stereotypical identificatory categories of ethnic, racial, gender, class or sexual distinctions. He explores how these artists ‘must negotiate between a fixed identity disposition and the socially encoded roles that are available for such subjects’. In the failure of identification, ‘disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology’. (Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 6, 11.)

For Judith Butler, disidentification is ‘that uneasy sense of standing under a sign to which one does and does not belong’. (Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 166.)

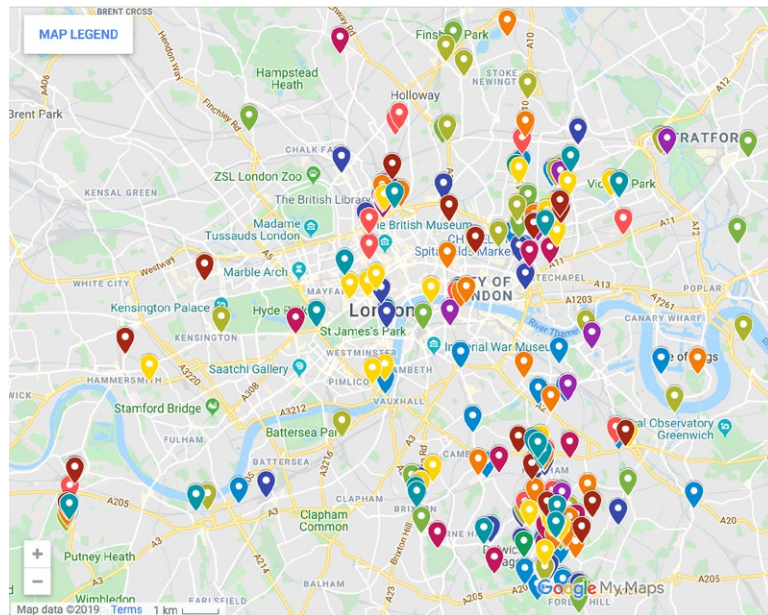
more positive message is that of *victimhood* – victim of sanctions, terrorism, misogyny, dictatorship, war, mal-education, human rights violation, and travel bans to name a few. I say ‘more positive’ because the flip side of victimhood is to be seen as the *cause* of war and terrorism, *responsible* for the lack of resources for the natives or *deserving* of misogyny and dictatorship. This victim identity of an artist often evokes feelings of pity or solidarity in the audience. Nearly fifty years before this lecture, Gloria Anzaldúa, in discussing the process of making and reading works by women of colour, wrote in *This Bridge Called My Back*, that women of colour are ‘tired of making a tragedy of [their] lives’, that they know that if they ‘posture as victims [they] *will* be victims’.¹ Although many would lounge in the identificatory tags and benefit from the market built around it, some artists tagged with such racial, ethnic, cultural, religious and sexual labels question how they can trigger their audience for responses beyond pity or solidarity? How can they make art that embraces the complexities of their positions?

Mishandled Archive and Tara Fatehi Irani cannot, and do not, dissociate themselves with the black identity and aesthetics from which they inevitably arise. Here, I use blackness in the sense that Laura Harris – following Fred Moten and Denise Ferreira da Silva among others – invokes. A blackness that is not only a matter of biological descent but is rather made from the coming together of those otherwise excluded. Blackness is thus ‘an expansive formation whose boundaries and associations are not fixed’.² Mishandled Archive and Fatehi Irani fit into, benefit from and unconsciously advocate this non-exclusionary blackness that is built on connecting differences.³ But this association with blackness should not be translated into only, or specifically, viewing

1 Moraga and Anzaldúa, *This Bridge*, 253.

2 Harris, *Experiments in Exile*, 4.

3 See Abiodun Tagoe’s piece, ‘Raise Your Arm in the Air, and Swing,’ on page 223.



Section of a map of all the locations where the daily pieces of Mishandled Archive took place, each colour represents a specific calendar month, created on Google My Maps.

the work through identificatory labelling. Blackness, brownness, Middle Easternness is not just one thing and is most probably not that one thing we have been trained to know.

Shahrzād and Fatehi Irani challenge identificatory, and often victimising, categories through disidentification. For example, Mishandled Archive uses visual codes and performative elements that are suggestive of these identificatory categories in order to subvert them. The itinerant, non-linear nature of Mishandled Archive subverts the negative image of the immigrant in the first two decades of the 21st century by celebrating the act of travelling. The stories behind Mishandled Archive all come from two women who travel and collect and tell stories as they travel. The 365 points on the map of Mishandled Archive celebrate itinerant bodies, bodies that move from place to place, be it in flesh or as documents and photographs. Ravanpoor also touches on the importance of itinerancy in Shahrzād's mission and the *Thousand and One Nights*. In another example, the dancing in public in Mishandled Archive annuls the classic question of the concerned intelligent Western

viewer: “I noticed you did this in Iran as well. Are you allowed to dance in public in Iran?”. To which the answer would always be: “it is more complex than that”. In other examples, an image of a woman in a chador on a church wall, or videos of women in headscarves dancing in the installation-performance iterations of the project confuse the singular stereotypical identifying categorisations.

This is not to say that there is no suffering, oppression and trauma (lived and inherited) in the histories of Fatehi Irani, Shahrzād or the photographed people in Mishandled Archive. In fact, there is indeed. They have been caught up in tragedies, large or small, within or outside their control. But they are also tired, as Anzaldúa writes, of representing their lives as tragedies. The strategies of endurance and of doing something ‘Little by Little, Again and Again’ – echoing both Rebecca Schneider’s ‘again and again’ and Suzanne Gauch’s ‘bit by bit’ – are evidence that for these people, there is more hope in continuity and life than in rupture or death;¹ the latter being the ongoing obsession of Derrida and Barthes when writing on photography, theatre and archives.² In this ‘again and again’ approach, achievement is gained in sharing micro-narratives in the gaps between the macro-narratives of death, war and trauma. Not to erase or even devalue the macro-narratives but to allow for smaller, less visible details to be seen. The frame of one thousand and one nights or three hundred and sixty five days allows for numerous unseen and unforeseen *short stories* (read *narratives*, *photographs* or *performances*) to be engaged with, even if for a single moment and in passing. Rather than expecting Shahrzād and Fatehi Irani to respond to a set menu of identificatory tags, that they may or may not relate to, we must allow them to tell their

1 See Schneider *Performing Remains*, 18. where she uses ‘again and again’ in relation to the continual reenactment of the American Civil War; and Gauch, *Liberating Shahrzād*, xviii. where she writes of Shahrzād’s strategy as a change that happens ‘bit by bit’.

2 See Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 14-15, 71-75, 92-96 (on the relation between the photograph and death), and 31-32, 90 (on how theatre links to death); and Derrida, *Archive Fever*. for the relations between archive and death. Also see page 112 of this volume.

story and tell it in their way. We must try to see their art away from identificatory expectations, because ... “it’s more complex than that”. And because there is a chance, if the work is of any artistic merit, that the work itself responds, or attempts to respond, to that complexity. In Leo Steinberg’s words, we can hold our criteria (the labels, the stereotypes, the expectations) with which we assess the artwork in reserve because these were formed ‘upon yesterday’s art’ and to encounter a new artwork we must meet the work on its own terms.¹

To encounter artworks free from identificatory labels is to recognise the creative labour and value the affective connection between the artwork and viewers – a connection that can be much more moving and empowering than pity or solidarity.² This affective connection does not disregard the political (cultural, social) tensions inherent in these artworks but, as Kathleen Stewart writes, ‘it permeates politics of all kinds with the demand that some kind of intimate public of onlookers recognize something in a space of shared impact’.³

On this note, let’s move on to the first segment of Anahid Ravnpoor’s lecture.

1 Steinberg, *Other Criteria*, 63.

2 Kathleen Stewart writes of the *jump* of affect where ‘a charge passes through the body and lingers for a little while as an irritation, confusion, judgement, thrill or musing’ (*Ordinary Affects*, 39-40). This jump from an artwork to a body or body to body is what Rebecca Schneider phrases as ‘response-ability’ after the concept of ‘call-and-response’ articulated by Anita Gonzalez in *Black Performance Theory*. For more on this, see Abiodun Tagoes’s piece on page 223.

3 Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 39.

Transcript of The Indirect Art Lectures Series

October 2, 2027

‘Little by Little, Again and Again’ by Anahid Ravanpoor

School of Oriental Studies (SOS)

This transcription was made live at SOS. References and footnotes have been added later.

Shereen Kran

Good evening everyone. My name is Shereen Kran and I am the director of the Indirect Art Lecture Series (IALS). The IALS invites thinkers, scholars and practitioners from a variety of disciplines in natural, formal and social sciences to speak *indirectly* about a work of art chosen by the members of the public and friends of the IALS. We are proud to have paired up requests from the public with speakers from fields as wide as biochemistry, anthropology, bioinformatics, history, data science, virtual intelligence, philosophy, toxicology, neuroscience, biopolitics and several transdisciplinary fields. Together we have explored a variety of artistic practices through lenses we could not have foreseen and discovered new intersections and possibilities that reveal the endless trajectories of thought.

The IALS does not have a physical home. We travel from one place to another, across continents, regions and institutions. Today we are honoured to be hosted at the SOS who have also kindly provided refreshments for this evening, do help yourselves as we will take a few breaks. I have been asked to announce on behalf of the SOS that there is no scheduled fire alarm test so if you hear an alarm please vacate the building. I hope the staff here will guide us to the nearest exit in the event of fire.

It is my great pleasure and honour to introduce our speaker of the evening Professor Anahid Ravanpoor, historian, mythologist

and Persian studies scholar, who with her lecture titled ‘Little by Little, Again and Again’ will *indirectly* [chuckles from the audience] talk about your chosen art project, Tara Fatehi Irani’s *Mishandled Archive*, on the tenth anniversary of its making. You all have Anahid’s biography on your devices so I will only point out some of the highlights of her career.

Anahid Ravanpoor is the author of *Ethics of Resistance: the Iranian Case* published by Amir Kabir in 2023, *Return to Plants* published by Sage in 2025, and most recently *Dancing in the Dark: Everyday Endurance and Micro-activism* published by Les Femmes, amongst several other works. She is also the director of the Invisible Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies (ICIS) and chief editor of *How Dare You* journal.

I am sure you are all familiar with Tara Fatehi Irani’s work but there is further information about her work and particularly *Mishandled Archive* on your devices. So, without further ado, please join me in welcoming Prof. Anahid Ravanpoor. [applause]

Anahid Ravanpoor

On Frame Story

Good evening everyone. Thank you so much for the introduction Shereen. It is an honour to be invited by the Indirect Art Lecture Series to speak around, or rather *beside* and *through*, one of Tara Fatehi Irani’s fantastic projects, *Mishandled Archive*, which although it is very different to her more recent works is still one of my favourite pieces by her. It is also an honour, but more of a confusing one, to be standing on this historic stage at the School of Oriental Studies who rather intelligently hide their Orientalism behind their acronym SOS which, ironically enough, immediately reminds us, or rather inserts us into, a state of emergency; of SOS. [audience laughter] Thank you for having me.

Knowing that I will be in the company of great interdisciplinary thinkers and practitioners, I decided to present to you my current research in progress with the hope of receiving comments and questions that can help with its further development. I hope you will bear with me as some parts may seem rather raw and unpolished.

I am going to talk about a subject most probably familiar to all of you: Shahrzād, the storyteller of *The Thousand Nights and One Night* (whom you might know by other variations of her name Scheherazade or Shahrazad or Shirazad). I will follow Shahrzād's trace to before and after the well-known *Thousand Nights and One Night*. If you scroll through the images on your screens you will see a very simple example of Shahrzād's transformations through different eras in the contemporary history of Iran. All images show the packaging of Shahrzad Tea, a well-known brand in Iran established in 1955. The first image is an example of the packaging before the 1979 revolution: Shahrzād is not covering her hair. The second image shows images from a rebranding in the years after the revolution (1980s) where her hair and neck are strictly covered. The other three images are from a rebranding of the products in 2014. Here, the Shahrzād on official television advertisements wears a scarf but in a more fashionable manner than the 80s, the Shahrzād on the tea package is wearing a loose scarf and the Shahrzād on the website icon has once again revealed her hair and neck; a perfect example of the complexities of today's Iran.¹ This journey of Shahrzād's appearance in less than fifty years reflects the changes in the socio-political environment of Iran during this half a century and hopefully offers a segue into this evening's talk on the transformations of Shahrzād throughout history.

1 For a history of Sharzad Tea brand, see 'Shahrzad Tea IMC Case Study,' *Badkobebeh*, spring 2015. http://badkoobeh.com/Media/images/Works/shahrzadtea/Shahrzad_Tea_Case_study.pdf



Packaging of Shahrzad Tea and its 1950s-70s logo.



Change of logo and branding of Shahrzad Tea after the 1979 revolution.



Rebranding of Shahrzad Tea in 2014, main product logo (top), logo for official advertising channels (bottom left), website logo (bottom right).

Rather than looking at the whole book of the *Thousand Nights and One Night*, I will focus mainly on the framing story of Shahrzād, her sister and the king, and follow this story and its characters with the help of an earlier, now physically disappeared, version of the book: *A Thousand Tales*. In tracing the footsteps of Shahrzād in a history that has repeatedly tried to erase her, we will discover how she has continuously survived and provided a platform for creative expression of writers, artists and filmmakers. Creative processes that are enabled through daily repetition and micro-activism. It is important to focus on this frame story because without it, the other thousand or so stories have no reason for being put together. This frame story is the *raison d'être* of all the other stories within the book. It is the only story that if removed would dismantle the whole structure of the book, whereas the other stories, those which Shahrzād tells the king, can be removed and added to, as they have been in their various translations, and it will not affect the whole book. The frame story is also important because all the other stories within *The Thousand Nights and One Night* are about other people, places and times and it is only the frame story that is about the storyteller, the nature of storytelling and the audience of the stories. In the words of Iranian mythologist, filmmaker and playwright, Bahram Beyzaei, '*A Thousand Tales* is a song by storytellers in praise of their own art'.¹

In the absence of a named author, Shahrzād is the only person in charge of the book and the stories. If the stories of *The Thousand Nights and One Night* were not told by a person (woman) under constant death threat, they would lose part of their appeal – as I believe they do in the likes of Pasolini's film where Shahrzād and the frame story are removed and only a story within a story structure is replicated and women are pictured as primarily sexual objects waiting to be found, sold, bought, aroused or abused by men.² I will also discuss, "indirectly", how the frame story of *The*

1 Beyzaei, *Hezar Afshan Kojast?*, 72. (All translations of *Hezar Afshan Kojast* [Where is A Thousand Tales] are my own)

2 Pasolini, *Mille e Una Notte*.

Thousand Nights and One Night is connected to the frame story of Mishandled Archive.

YZ

I would like to propose a short pause in the lecture – apologies if you were deeply absorbed. I want to pause over the function of frame stories and framing devices through looking at artworks that Mishandled Archive makes me recall.

First let's consider the works of Lebanese artist Walid Raad. Whether performed, exhibited or published, Raad's works are often introduced by some form of a foreword that serves the function of a frame story. In examining the use of fiction in works of contemporary art concerned with practices and politics of deception, Carrie Lambert-Beatty categorises the work of Walid Raad and The Atlas Group as 'parafiction', a kind of fiction that is experienced as fact even if for a short duration:

Fiction or fictiveness has emerged as an important category in recent art. But, like a paramedic as opposed to a medical doctor, a parafiction is related to but not quite a member of the category of fiction as established in literary and dramatic art. It remains a bit outside. It does not perform its procedures in the hygienic clinics of literature, but has one foot in the field of the real. Unlike historical fiction's fact-based but imagined worlds, in parafiction real and/or imaginary personages and stories intersect with the world as it is being lived.¹

¹ Lambert-Beatty, 'Make-Believe,' 54. For more on fiction as a mode of existence and an artistic choice and a device deployed by contemporary artists, see O'Sullivan, 'Mythopoesis or Fiction as Mode of

Most of Raad's frame stories, be it for works he made under the name of *The Atlas Group* or those under his own name, relate to the contemporary history of Lebanon and the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). Raad creates archives that are framed by a fictional story; but one that still retains connections with historical facts or events. His fabricated documents are organised into archives that make material evidence for the histories they engage with (that of the Lebanese Civil War, for example) and suggest an alternative history. This alternative history does not (and cannot) replace conventional history but it becomes an addition to it; a new perspective that allows viewers to question history as it is often told, taught and circulated. The frame stories that Raad creates for his archives start from gaps in existing narratives of history and fill those gaps with narratives, events and documents. Raad's framing devices – the forewords – put the exhibited material into an overarching context and allow him to share collections of photographs, videos, notebooks and other material that may have had no place in history otherwise.

One of Raad's long term projects is The Atlas Group: a non-profit foundation that researches and documents the contemporary history of Lebanon. As a foundation The Atlas Group is imaginary and invented by Raad but even as an imaginary foundation it does research and challenge the histories it claims to engage with. The Atlas Group state that they collaborate with Walid Raad as well as other artists, researchers and historians who generously donate material to the foundation. Through the name and story of this foundation, Raad exhibits several photographic, video and mixed media works in relation to contemporary Lebanon. For example, 226 notebooks and two short films were donated to The Atlas Group to analyse and exhibit by Dr Fadl Fakhouri, the foremost historian of the Lebanese civil wars according to The

Atlas Group.¹ The short history of Dr Fakhouri and his numerous notebooks is a framing device that allows Raad to frame and exhibit his personal photographs, scribbled notebooks, and other found or created documents.

As a 'parafictioneer', in Lambert-Beatty's words, Raad is producing and managing 'plausability' with these frame stories:

Plausibility (as opposed to accuracy) is not an attribute of a story or image, but of its encounter with viewers, whose various configurations of knowledge and "horizons of expectation" determine whether something is plausible *to them*.²

By depending on the viewers' 'various configurations of knowledge', which differs depending on their cultural, social, national and language backgrounds, *parafiction*, as in Raad's work, creates a 'multiplicity' of understandings and interpretations.³

In another example from Raad, *Miraculous Beginnings*, the frame story is as follows. During the demolition of Beirut's historical commercial districts after the war, a series of large photographic prints were discovered buried under 32 metres of rubble. After long and expensive chemical and digital processing of the photographs in the United States, small black and white group portraits of men and women were revealed in these prints. The detailed foreword that offers the history of the found photographs is signed by 'Fouad Boustani, Director, Beirut Photographic Center'.⁴ The detailed accounts, name and signature of Boustani, yet another fictional character, give sense and meaning to the exhibition of a series of found photographs: unidentified group portraits of people who have all put on smiles and seem to be at

1 *The Atlas Group Archive*, www.theatlasgroup.org.

2 Lambert-Beatty, 'Make-Believe,' 72-73.

3 Lambert-Beatty, 73.

4 Raad, *Scratching on Things*, 6.

some official gathering. The text accompanying each of the photographs confirms that the individuals in all of the photographs have been identified and were either 'arrested in Paris (France) in 1987', or 'drowned at sea in 1991', or 'died of natural causes in 1979', or 'are currently living in Freetown (Sierra Leone)' among other destinies.¹

Another example of a frame story which also relates to the demolition of the commercial district of Beirut in the war is in Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige's series of burnt photographs and postcards presented in an installation titled *Wonder Beirut*. The first part of *Wonder Beirut* is called 'The Story of a Pyromaniac Photographer' (1998-2006) which is based on the collection of a fictional Lebanese photographer, Abdallah Farah. Farah was commissioned by the Lebanese State in 1968-69 to take pictures of the Beirut Central District and its luxury hotels to be edited as postcards that show the glamour of Beirut in the 1960s. Most of the places captured in the postcards were destroyed in the war but the postcards are still on sale. Since 1975, Farah has been burning his negatives of the postcards in accordance with the damages the sites have received in the war.² These images of smouldered post cards which work to destroy and deform the idealised past of Beirut are exhibited in the second part of the project 'Postcards of war'. The framing story of Farah, a pyromaniac photographer, supports Joreige and Hadjithomas in putting together and presenting an installation of enlarged images of smouldered 1960s postcards from Lebanon and 6452 undeveloped rolls of film said to contain photos taken by Farah.³

Projects such as these, similar to *Mishandled Archive* and *A Thousand Tales* which we will soon return to, show the importance of framing devices in order to draw the audience through a series of different material (stories, photographs, films, etc.) and create plausible, albeit

1 Raad, 8-15.

2 Hadjithomas and Joreige, 'The Story of a Pyromaniac Photographer'.

3 Toufic, *Two or Three Things*, 114.

imaginary, stories. The frame stories become the trick that attracts and focuses the attention of the audience. They turn the artworks at the first moment of engagement into a performance where all the elements start to perform within a larger story. And then, there come the details such as “I heard this happened in Baghdad”, or at a hotel in Beirut, or to the Persian king or a pyromaniac photographer, or at the Indirect Art Lecture Series at the SOS. These framing details reauthenticate the journey that the audience has embarked on and allows them to experience a whole from the many fragments (of photographs or stories) they receive. Now let’s return to the lecture.

Anahid Ravanpoor

On Frame Story (*continued*)

My research, of course, is a work in progress. I have been involved with this research for quite a while. For a few years, I have been working on translating an instrumental book in the study of Shahrzād by Iranian scholar Bahram Beyzaei, which I will refer to frequently in this talk. Through this process, I have constantly been interrupted by other more pressing projects. My research into Shahrzād and her sister and the translation of Beyzaei’s book feels almost like a never-ending project which I suppose is similar to “the infinite book” of *The Thousand Nights and One Night* itself. I, like many others, including Jorge Luis Borges, have all the volumes of *The Thousand Nights and One Night* on my bookshelf but have not yet finished reading them all ... and I don’t suppose I ever will.¹ As we will discuss, the obsession with finishing the *Thousand Nights and One Night*, by that I mean to finish writing the unfinished book and finish reading the book from cover to

1 Borges, ‘Thousand and One Nights,’ 42.

cover, is rather beside the point and against the logic of the book. The same might be true of my research.

I hope that this talk will be of interest in relation to Mishandled Archive as I know you are keen to find connections between the two but more importantly I hope it can have a life of its own. I plan to offer thoughts that touch the surface of Mishandled Archive; and I must clarify that *surface* is by no means negative for me. It is in fact the inclusive, accessible and inviting area that allows works like mine to sit next to works like Mishandled Archive – to touch it but not rip it apart in order to land in the depths.

All translators and researchers of *The Thousand Nights and One Night* agree on the brilliance and the magical qualities of the book. Its effects on European literature and readers since its very first translation in the early eighteenth century is admitted by many. In his lecture, 'The Thousand and One Nights', Jorge Luis Borges writes of the first European translation of the book as 'a major event for all of European literature'.¹ He suggests that the Romantic movement started long before the dates assigned to it and 'at that moment when someone, in Normandy or in Paris, read *The Thousand and One Nights*'.²

There is an on-going dispute on which stories originally belong to *The Thousand Nights and One Night* and which ones were added by the translators. But what all the variations in one way or another have in common is the frame story:

King Shahriar is betrayed by his wife and maddened as a result. He swears to marry a maiden every night and kill her the next morning. He does so for three years until Shahrzād, the daughter of the king's vizier, volunteers herself to be married to the king against her father's will. She plots to save her own and other women's lives with the help of her sister Dīnāzād. At the king's

1 Borges, 39.

2 Borges, 45.

bedroom on the night Shahriar marries Shahrzād, she asks the king to allow her sister, Dīnāzād, into the chamber on her last night.

Enter Dīnāzād.

Following their plan, Dīnāzād asks Shahrzād to tell her one of her great stories. Shahrzād tells a story upon the permission of the king and continues till the break of dawn when she falls silent. Dīnāzād appreciates the story and Shahrzād responds that this is nothing compared to the story she would tell her the next day if the king lets her live. Shahriar, curious to hear the rest of Shahrzād's unfinished story, says: 'I will spare her until I hear the rest of the story; then I will have her put to death the next day' and so, in this manner, Shahrzād keeps telling the king stories and postponing her death night after night.¹

YZ

Note the king's phobia of women and how he punishes them. Shahrzād's strategies of survival in the face of these phobic tendencies is a form of disidentification with the stereotype of women at the time. Perhaps I should briefly remind us of Muñoz's framing of disidentification:

Disidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship.²

1 Mahdi and Haddawy, *The Arabian Nights*, 75.

2 Muñoz, *Disidentification*, 4.

It may be a stretch to fit Shahrzād into this frame but it is useful to have thoughts on disidentification in the back of our minds as we move forward.

Anahid Ravanpoor

On Frame Story (*continued*)

Researchers often get lost amongst the many copies, manuscripts and translations of *The Thousand Nights and One Night* and fail to locate the trajectory of its creation and evolution. Although this lostness can be seen as a continuation of the transnationality and transculturality of the book, what most historians fail to do is a study of the most prominent character of *The Thousand Nights and One Night*: Shahrzād. A study that does not only use what is now available to us in *The Thousand Nights and One Night* – which is done in some feminist and post-colonial readings – but also looks at the reiterations of Shahrzād since ancient myths. This is what Bahram Beyzaei does in his two books *The Genealogy of the Ancient Tree* (2004) and *Where Is A Thousand Tales?* (2012). The latter is the work I am currently translating.

A significant reference in studying the genealogy of *The Thousand Nights and One Night* and Shahrzād is a quote from the tenth century Arab historian, Ibn-an-Nadīm, from his book *The Fihrist* which is a catalogue of all the books known to him up to his time. In a chapter on ‘evening stories’, Ibn-an-Nadīm writes:

The first people to collect stories, devoting books to them and safeguarding them in libraries, some of them being written as though animals were speaking, were the early Persians. Then the Ashkānian kings, the third dynasty of Persian monarchs took notice of this [literature]. The Arabs translated it into the Arabic language and then, when masters of literary style and eloquence became interested, they refined

and elaborated it, composing what was similar to it in content.¹

Ibn-an-Nadīm clearly mentions how oral stories turned into books and then into libraries in ancient Iran. There is also a clear attention to the retelling and translation of narratives across times and places. ‘The first book to be written with this content [evening story]’, Ibn-an-Nadīm writes, ‘was the book *Hazār Afsān*, which means “a thousand stories”’.² The word *Hazār* (pronounced *hezār* in contemporary Farsi) means “thousand” and the word *Afsān* means “tale”. This Iranian book is what I refer to as *A Thousand Tales*. Ibn-an-Nadīm continues to give us the frame story of *A Thousand Tales* which we immediately recognise as that of the *Thousand Nights and One Night*:

The basis for this [name] is that one of their [Iranian] kings used to marry a woman, spend a night with her, and kill her the next day. Then he married a concubine of royal blood who had intelligence and wit. She was called Shahrāzād, and when she came to him she would begin a story, but leave off at the end of the night, which induced the king to spare her, asking her to finish it the night following. This happened to her for a thousand nights, during which time he [the king] had intercourse with her, until because of him she was granted a son, whom she showed to him, informing him of the trick played upon him. Then, appreciating her intelligence, he was well disposed towards her and kept her alive. The king had a head of the household named Dīnār Zād who was in league with her in this matter.³

We know that the last Farsi edition of *A Thousand Tales* existed

1 Ibn-an-Nadīm, *The Fihrist*, 713.

2 Ibn-an-Nadīm, 713. In the original Arabic text *Hazār Afsān* is translated to الف خرافه (Alf Khurafa).

3 Ibn-an-Nadīm, 713.

until the 13th century and there is no evidence of it since then.¹ But the questions which remain are, “How do we talk about things that don’t exist anymore? What happens to a book that disappears in history? Does it turn to dust, ash, another story, energy, a memory? And what happens to Shahrzād and Dīnāzād when the physical object of the book disappears?”

¹ Beyzaei, *Hezar Afsan Kojast?*, 21.



Survival (or) Disappearance: What Happens After the Fire?

The Incomplete Memoirs of the Time-travelling Arsonist

Nineteen year old backpacker uncovers the person behind thousands arson attacks.

On June 23, Zeeta Nera, a nineteen-year-old backpacker travelling in Matemwe village, on the north eastern coast of Zanzibar, discovered a notebook in the remains of a campfire. "I saw smouldering logs from afar", says Nera, "as I got closer I noticed a notebook in the flames being buried under its own ashes". Nera saved the notebook from burning up. "I started reading it until it got too dark to read. The notebook was hot and difficult to hold through the whole night. It wasn't an easy to read handwriting either. I can read English, Arabic and Latin but there were many sections in languages I did not know. Also some sections were fully incinerated but I sensed that they are memoirs written by an arsonist".

Latifa Amani, a researcher at Zanzibar's National Museum, says: "The memoir is a single notebook but it documents the adventures of a person who has lived for thousands of years and been all around the globe. At this stage it is difficult to determine to what extent the events in these memoirs are true".

"Parts of the patched cover of the notebook dates back to 400 BCE and there is writing in ink that dates to

June 2018, only hours before its discovery", Amani added.

It appears that no section of the memoir has been written in a single era. The main body, clippings from other books and manuscripts, side notes and corrections appear to have been written in the course of centuries. Fifty seven distinct languages, many of them now extinct, have been identified in the memoir and the ink seems to hold traces of ash from several eras and locations.

There is evidence of the memoirs' author having travelled to China, Iran, Dharawal Country, Afghanistan, Peru, Scandinavia and hundreds of other places. Researchers are also suggesting that on a visit to the US the anonymous arsonist got very close to the American writer Ray Bradbury. The collection of stories 'A Pleasure to Burn' which was published under Bradbury's name many years after its writing is now suspected to have been written by the anonymous arsonist. Following years of spending time with the arsonist, between 1947-51, Bradbury went on to develop and publish the arsonist's stories into his ground-breaking novel *Fahrenheit 451*.

Khialat Daily

Tuesday 3 July 2018

In June 2018, a half-burnt notebook was discovered by a backpacker in the remnants of a campfire in Zanzibar. After investigations the notebook was revealed to be a memoir written by an anonymous Arsonist appearing to have been travelling through time. Handwritten in many languages and in ink made from ashes from different historical eras, the memoir is the result of millenia of fires and writing and the tension between these two.

Now let's take a step aside to June 23, 2017. On this date, less than ten days after a deadly fire at London's Grenfell Tower and, by chance, exactly a year after UK's EU referendum, Tara Fatehi Irani was invited by the editors of the *Lexicon for an Affective Archive* (2017), Giulia Palladini and Marco Pustianaz, to respond to their book with a performative work at its launch event at the Live Art Development Agency in London.

A section in the opening of *Lexicon for an Affective Archive* is titled 'A tale of fire and books'. Palladini and Pustianaz write of embodied archives: destroyed archives revived through the bodies of those who carry them, not just in their memories but in their flesh. They write of the *hommes-livres (book-people)* of François Truffaut's film *Fahrenheit 451* (1966). The *book-people*, who originally appear in Ray Bradbury's novel *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), are a group of men – and women in Truffaut's version – who are on the run from the state that is systematically burning all books. These people have decided to embody their favourite books to stop a total amnesia and disappearance of the contents of books and soon the *book* as a concept. The *book-people* live in the dark heart of the forest hiding from the police and the firemen who are looking to burn any trace of books and people who show affection to them.¹

1 Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*. The concept of the novel is created by the Arsonist but it first became available in print in Bradbury's book.

Pustianaz draws two ‘lessons’ from this ‘tale’:

Firstly, if a body can become an archive, it is only because the body is already a living archive. Secondly, if an archive can be turned into a body, the fantasy of closure inherent in archival conservation is already compromised. In effect, once tied to a body, the archive is tied up with the history of that body, implying becoming and mortality.¹

As an alternative to conservation and preservation, under conditions such as in Bradbury’s dystopia where these are made impossible, the archive is reactivated through ‘transmission which implies translation and change’.²

This loss of the paper archive and its resurgence in the body resonates well with what seems to be Fatehi Irani’s mission in *Mishandled Archive* – transforming the archive from paper to body, from text to choreography. A transformation that is enabled by the destruction of the archive in fire or in time – be that a real destruction as in the work of the Arsonist or a performative one operated on copies of documents as in *Mishandled Archive*. After the fire, an archive whose *domicile*, whose *house*, whose *arkheion* – to use the terms of Jacques Derrida that we all seem to be repeating and repeating – is burnt down, is forced to travel. It is, as Pustianaz writes, ‘forced to embrace nomadism and migration’. The embodied archive is not guaranteed survival, but left to the generosity and survival of the bodies that by chance receive and welcome its ‘affective potential’.³

So, back to June 23, 2017 – day 174 of *Mishandled Archive*. Fatehi Irani presented a live iteration of *Mishandled Archive* at the book launch. In addition to presenting the project she also created that day’s *Mishandled Archive* piece live in front of the audience

1 Palladini and Pustianaz, *Lexicon*, 14.

2 Palladini and Pustianaz, 15.

3 Palladini and Pustianaz, 15.

and in response to the *Lexicon for an Affective Archive*. In the *Lexicon* there are a few pages, in the middle of the book, intentionally left blank as an invitation to readers to fill it with their own affective archive entry. Fatehi Irani placed the photograph of that day, a man, a father, holding a baby girl standing in an alleyway by a brick wall, on the first empty page in the book, in the copy that was to remain at LADA's archive in their Study Room. This piece was titled 'Survival and Disappearance (i.e. What happens after the fire)', clearly a response to 'The Tale of Fire and Books' in the *Lexicon* (which the editors had also read out at the event), as well as the Grenfell fire that had caused stories of survivors – fathers clasping their daughters and running down dark smoke-filled stairways – to circulate.

'Survival and Disappearance (i.e. What happens after the fire)' is also gesturing towards another incident that had previously seeped into Mishandled Archive: the fire that engulfed Plasco tower in Central Tehran on January 19, 2017 (day 19 of Mishandled Archive). On that day, Fatehi Irani left an original 1970s postcard on Vauxhall Bridge under the title 'From the 11th floor'. The Plasco tower fire was said to have started from the 11th floor, hence the title. The postcard, which became the only instance of an original document being dispersed as part of Mishandled Archive, featured a photograph of central Tehran as a reminder of the area around the time that Plasco tower was built (1960s). The movements in the dance also seem to resemble those of the collapse of the building in the fire which was widely released live on media as the fire was spreading.



From the 11th floor.

On [#Vauxhall](#) Bridge

4 °C

19/365

Preface:

The buildings that burn.

The lives that end. 'My friend is calling me from under the rubble, help him'

[#Tehran's](#) [#Plasco](#) building is no more.

[#dance](#): I stood on both feet. Balanced. An irregular tremble (I mean with an irregular and rather random pattern and frequency) started in my chest. The radius of the movement gradually got larger and the intensity higher - but still not moving the legs.

My left forearm travelled on my abs and chest into a folded upwards pose and touched my left shoulder, was then bent 90° forward and then turned out to the left and graciously down to the floor. My whole body collapsed following the left arm.

The postcard was found later that day by a passer-by who wrote to the artist that night. The two seem to have kept contact for months. When asked what she has done with the postcard many months later, the finder said: 'I carry it in the pocket of my sketchbook as a reminder of how art can make you feel'.¹

¹ Private conversation with Tara Fatehi Irani, courtesy of the artist.

I have told you these tales of fire as an introduction to *The Incomplete Memoirs of the Time-travelling Arsonist*; to remind ourselves how fire, burning and destruction are embedded in specific pieces of Mishandled Archive but also in the ethos of the project as a whole.

What is offered here for you to read is an English translation of the memoirs translated by a team of seventy-nine translators specialised in a variety of contemporary, ancient and extinct languages. All dates, where available, have been converted to the common Gregorian calendar and the most common spellings of names of people and places have been carefully chosen by the translators. The Arsonist had not cited any of their resources but the editors have marked anything suspected of being borrowed or in some way related to other texts in footnotes. I am grateful to all the translators who worked hard against an ever-shortening deadline imposed by the memoirs, particularly the leads of the team Manita van Persie, Sonia Makhmutova, Pasha Sardarzi, Reem Yarfi and Roxan Alexandrou for who made this significant historical and literary work accessible through their translations.

The Arsonist

How can ashes sustain a print, when ashes are precisely that which may disperse and drift away? And what would it mean to leave a trace, or a reminder in that which is, itself, a remainder, the ash that is the burned up trace of what is incinerated? The figure of ash itself is, indeed, not only a substratum for a writing that has taken place, but the figure of a writing that is burning up.

Cathy Caruth, 'After the End'¹

Circa 500 BCE

A pleasant afternoon in May.

I agree with Diodorus Siculus. *Parsa*, or as the Greeks call it *Persepolis*, was 'the richest city under the sun.'² The winters though, were rather miserable. With all the mountains surrounding the city, it was cold, wet and muddy. But the spring and summer were so pleasant, I could hardly persuade myself to go elsewhere for centuries. On one side the rocky Mount Mercy and on the other vast green meadows.

¹ Cathy Caruth, 'After the End,' 42.

² Diodorus, *Library of History* 17.70.2.

nārang → nāranj → orange → orange
 (Persian) (Arabic) (old French) (late Middle English)

نارنج
 bitter orange

برنج
 bergamot

Vineyards spread for thousands of acres. Orchards of narang and torang aplenty. In spring, the city was filled with the scent of narang blossoms. Sour, sweet and fresh. A river, can't remember its name, ran through the meadow and its water was led into the orchards and the city via canals. The water was covered in fallen blossoms in June. Pulvar, Pulvar ... that's what it's called, the river I mean. Every spring, delegates from all the states would come to Parsa, the capital, to congratulate the Persian king for the new year and present them gifts. This was really beautiful ... but only as far as the wine and music and dancers went; the whole king, kingdom and royalty business I have never understood nor cherished.

I was a scribe at the Persepolis Fortification Archive during the reign of Darius I. Keeping records of transactions of foodstuff and services was my main role: figs, donkeys, wheat, wine, workers. But I kept some secrets as well. The Queen's maid confided in me stories of things that happened on the streets with the ordinaries – love, theft, rage, coitus, treason. I think it was my feminine disposition that gained her sisterly trust. I inscribed all of these little stories in Imperial Aramaic on clay tablets and stored them with the rest of the transaction tablets – all in beautiful but smelly *royal ink*. At the time, all the scribes were good in clay incision techniques but I was, I think, particularly chosen for this job for my

ability to write in ink, which, unbeknownst to my employers, I had perfected in 4th century China.

I did not secretly intrude into the archives with the maid's stories just because I was bored with my day to day duty – oh I was bored to death. My whole day was '4 and handfuls 6 flour took, '25 men took for 22 days, 'wine, 40 mry, 'craftsmen, freemen, 40 ... boys 17 ... came from ...' ———dead bored of course.¹ But that was not the only reason why I started slipping unofficial stories into the archives. I must clarify, I do not just make and burn archives for entertainment but rather consider myself an experimental researcher. I learn things by doing and when I see all that is to remain of a glorious empire (ukhkkk) and its peoples, palaces, knowledge and meadows is how many donkeys were borrowed for how many days and when was the King's bowel movement in a good enough flow to inspire another epigraph in praise of himself, it just makes me mad. Oh it makes me so mad. All the Xerxeses, Caesars, Tsars, Zhengs, Wilhelms and Elizabeths I have seen are the same. Anyhow – not ranting, not ranting – on a rainy winter evening many years later, long after that maid – my partner in crime – and many maids after her were dead, I

1 University of Chicago, OCHRE, Persepolis Fortification Aramaic Tablets (PFAT 332, PFAT 204, PFAT 347, PFAT 184).

was busted. A little bird seemed to have chirruped to the master of treasury that “this fella [me] is not honest in their account”. I had never claimed honesty and I think I was very honest in not claiming honesty. Anyhow, I was immediately expelled from the archives and kicked out into the muddy slushy grounds. I was deeply annoyed and felt disrespected. I left Parsa for a few years.

For some time, I had been interested in the erasure of history, ‘not only of past history but of present history’.¹ I wondered how we can think about history through the lens of erasure or the possibility of erasure. Around the year of Tiger (485 BCE) I again persuaded myself to go to Parsa; this time as a dream interpreter by the name of Artabanos. I became close to King Xerxes I and, it is true, I became so well-known that thousands of years later the most notable of writers wrote of my wisdom:

The ancients shared this idea of the dependence of the content of dreams on life. To cite Radestock [54] (p. 134): about to begin his campaign against Greece, Xerxes was dissuaded from this decision by sound advice, but was spurred on to it again and again by his dreams; at this, the rational old dream-interpreter of the

¹ Cambridge University, *Cathy Caruth: After the End*.

Persians, Artabanos, told him quite rightly that dream-images usually contain what the dreamer already thinks when awake.¹

It was my belief that 'if opposite opinions are not uttered, it is impossible for someone to choose the better' and I said so to the king.² I advised him against attacking the Greeks and against undermining the power of the Greeks.

While Xerxes was considering whether to abandon the expedition, he spoke of an emissary of the gods who comes to him in his dreams and urges him to attack the Greeks. I told him I have lived many years more than him – I did not exactly say how many years as it would cause him great distress – and I know that dreams are not the work of gods but the thoughts we are occupied with during the day. But where is the ear who listens? And let me set the record straight, I did not say all the things that Herodotus wrote on my behalf in his *Histories* about a divine motivation pushing us into war, of course I didn't. I did, however, warn Xerxes that war is not the only solution and 'great damages are likely to arise.'³ I warned him. I did.

1 Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 131.

2 Herodotus, *Histories* 7.10A.

3 Herodotus, 7.10F.

Herodotus has written about me hesitantly wearing Xerxes's robes and awaiting a haunting figure at night in the king's bed. That's a load of historical claptrap – unheard of, absurd – how come no one asks how Herodotus could have known such intimate conversations between me and the king in the royal bed? I certainly never circulated such toffee. (Herodotus, *Histories*, 7.16-18)

It is no surprise that Xerxes did not take my advice. He conjured one of the largest armies ever seen in those times and led the second Persian invasion of Greece. Now, I am not a war historian, I am not even a historian, so allow me to skip all the details of blood, screams, arrows and else that I witnessed.

I left the army and stayed in Athens – I became a Scythian widow in an empty city. The Athenians had already fled their city and the Persian army departed after their victory. There wasn't a single soul left in Athens but me. Even the toothless potter who wouldn't dare to leave behind his broken pottery had eventually left. There was no voice other than mine and no human shadow other than mine. Till one day, I heard another voice. At first I thought it's from the sky but I noticed that's just from reading too many Greek myths. Then I noticed that there is no voice other than mine. That I was hearing myself thinking and shouting "Flames, flames, flames".

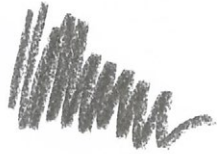
"Burn down the temples", I heard myself think.

And just like that, I started a fire in the Acropolis. "Bring down the gods", my voice said to myself. I did – well I broke a few statues.

"Let the ashes become history".

“Let these statuettes be remembered in their disappearance”.
When I was shouting these words, they sounded less like the words of an attention seeking prophet but they don’t quite work the same on the page as I write them down.

When the Athenians returned, they immediately quenched the fire. They were not happy to see Athena’s severed face. They ceremonially buried her in the wall alongside older debris and concluded my mission to render her invisible.





An Open Invitation to
Punch Your Heart

For things to make sense as we go along – although they may not make much sense now – we need to move on to another scene where the events of this volume take place: the 22nd century, in the ruins of the digital world.

Soon we will enter #YouShallSeeBlood MRX (Multiple Reality Experience) in 2117. The MRX is held as part of an exhibition on the centenary of Mishandled Archive at resaoM ranoH space in Chengdu. resaoM ranoH space offers multiple interactive augmented reality experiences to visitors guided by the creators of the exhibition: researchers, curators, funders, artists.

What follows is a final human readable draft of a sample MRX for a sample visitor. This sample experience is led by Wang Shu, a web-archaeologist who discovers debris of Mishandled Archive in obsolete web-archives in the second half of the 21st century. The experience is adjusted and remodelled based on the visitor's choices and emotional reactions.

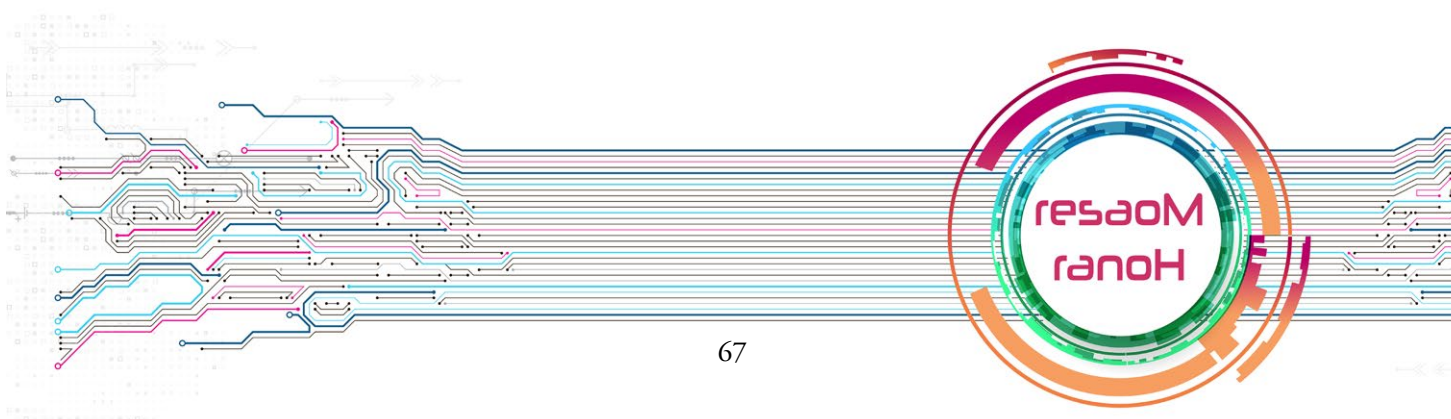
In what follows, the project is revived through fractions of code using the primitive technology of the late 21st and early 22nd century. This MRX explores another perspective on Mishandled Archive – one that solely relies on its digital remains. Through this MRX we will discover that some dimensions of the project stick around for a century, occupying invisible spaces as codes, stories and even emotions. They make people dance in unexpected ways and open new possibilities beyond the title Mishandled Archive.

READ ME: #YouShallSeeBlood Multiple Reality Experience

Before entering the MRX, all visitors select a primary guide for themselves from a range of available guide characters. All guide characters are based on real people who have been involved in the making of the exhibition. resaoM ranoH offers three visitor packages: GOLD, PREMIUM and MEGA.

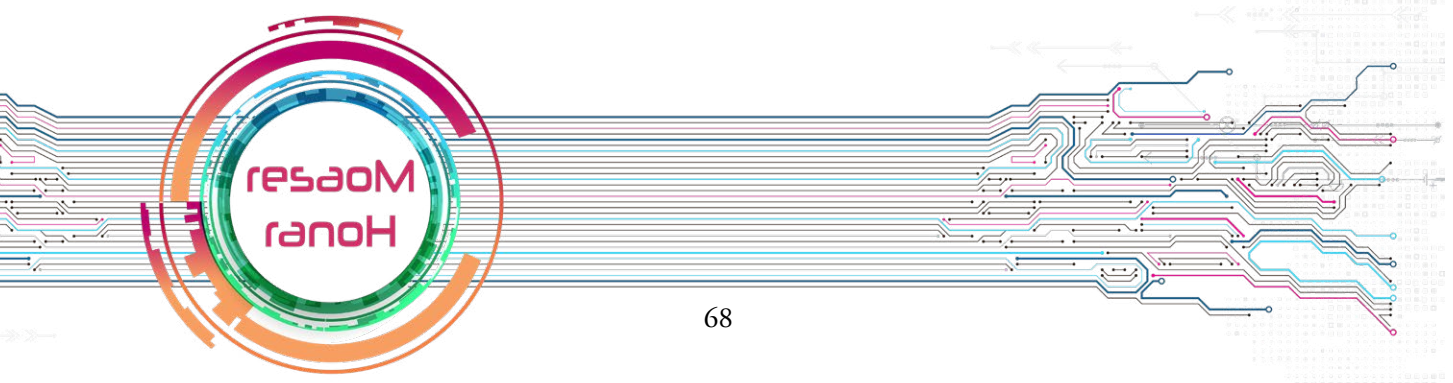
GOLD visitors receive all the standard features. More add-ons and optional features are available to PREMIUM and MEGA tiers. For example, PREMIUM and MEGA visitors can change their point of view (POV) any time during the MRX for a maximum of four times and experience the MRX through the eyes of other people (visitors or staff) they meet on the journey. **There is a maximum 10 v-minutes time limit for each POV change for health and safety reasons.** MEGA visitors can also change their guide any time during the MRX. The MRX does not only augment and multiply spatial reality through visual and tactile engagement, it also multiplies temporal realities. The whole MRX lasts about 5 minutes in real time but feels like 1.5 hours to an indefinite amount of time depending on visitor choices and optional add-ons.

Since the human body is prone to be deluded in longer Multiple Reality Experiences and feel entrapped in itself, a moderate dose of movement has been recommended by the NLA and is implemented through the use of kinecommands. Visitors will be given the option to install kinecommands on their systems to allow them to control optional features of the MRX through simple bodily gestures. Installing the kinecommands would allow visitors to automatically perform the gestures. In other words, these visitors would give temporary control of their limbs to the kinecommand servers. Visitors who choose not to install the kinecommands can still perform them manually by following the commands menu that lists



all the approved movements. Prior to the start, each visitor will also set their preferred levels of verbal and physical engagement, and will choose whether they want to install temporary visions, emotions and weather conditions on their systems. These installations will create a more lifelike experience but are optional in case of allergic mental reactions. Some of these adjustments can be manually set during the MRX using appropriate kinecommands. A full SN version is available for visitors with movement difficulties.

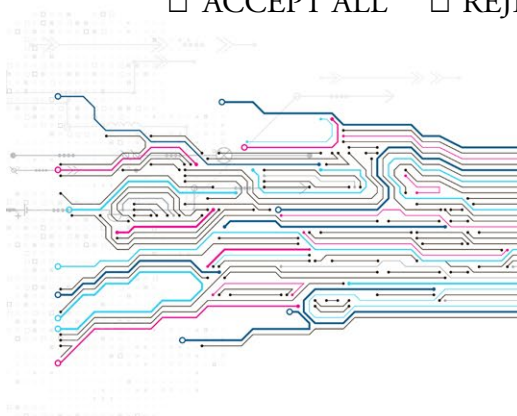
The script is interspersed with basic visual guidelines `{go//}` and `{merge//}`, vital machine actions `{~/}` and sample kinecommands `[cmd//]`. As a general guideline, all functions in `[]` are presumed reactions of a sample visitor and all functions in `{ }` are for machine use only. Results of the sample kinecommands are not reflected in the script and the commands are only offered as guidelines for those opting in for automated kinecommands. Basic interactive verbal and emotional options are marked in the script `{optn//}` but the main interactive design happens following the script stage in fully machine-led environments inaccessible in human language.



COMMAND MENU

{optn// install commands / continue without installation} To continue please consent to the installation of the following kinecommands on your system. **ACCEPT ALL** for full installation. **MAKE SELECTION** to allow partial installation. **REJECT ALL** to perform all kinecommands manually using an augmented guide.

- ☐ Roll R-Indx: learn more
- ☐ Pump L-Cheek: show examples
- ☐ L-Thread-drag: rewind
- ☐ R-Thread-drag: fast forward
- ☐ Pinch-in: micro zoom
- ☐ Pinch-out: macro zoom
- ☐ Lip Zip: mute/unmute host
- ☐ R-palm forward: summon object
- ☐ Bend L-Thumb: change POV
- ☐ Joint L-Peace: go with a friend
- ☐ Twiddle: increased poetic trek
- ☐ R-Mid-Indx knuckle tap: increased history trek
- ☐ RL-Tiptoe tap: standard trek
- ☐ Punch Heart: install emotion
- ☐ L-Palm on skull: install weather
- ☐ R-Fist tap L-palm: freeze all machine functions
- ☐ R-Toe tip-up + blink: emergency exit (1)
- ☐ Triple ZY-Breath: emergency exit (2)
- ☐ ACCEPT ALL ☐ REJECT ALL



At a time when it seems like the dance scores of the project are lost and in no way recoverable, the recreation of the work at resaoM ranoH results in a dance of its own kind – a dance of gestures known as kinecommands performed by all visitors. If we could observe the visitors who are going through this MRX, we would see how Mishandled Archive is translated into a dance in which all visitors are rolling their index fingers, filling their left cheeks with air, punching their hearts, tapping their knuckles and dragging their fingers in the air.



Wang Shu

{~/Checkpoint 10.03.01}

{optn// install joy4.3 / excitement0.4 / impatience1.2 / continue
without emotion supply} [cmd// Punch Heart]

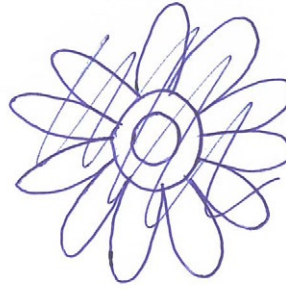
{host value>>Wang Shu}

Hi {visitor name}. My name is Wang Shu. I am the {host updated position} and I'm really glad that you've chosen to hear my side of the story. I hope you've enjoyed your day so far at {visitor location(s)} and {optn// are not too tired to continue / ready to start the journey / as excited as I am to go on this journey}. Brilliant. Well, our story starts long before this exhibition, back in 2087. I hear you like {visitor like, visitor like and visitor like}, this should be definitely the light of your tunnel. I'll make sure to pack in some stuff you really enjoy.

Ready to go? Double blink twice when you're ready to start.



Fools, Kings, Ashes and a Courtesan



The Arsonist

Oct 331 BCE

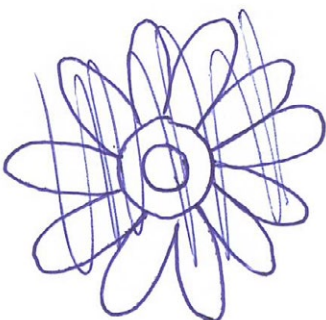
On the road to Persepolis with Alexander and his army. I miss the narenj blossoms and the wine in Persepolis. Oh the rich jammy dark wine.

They call me Thaïs of Attic now. Thaïs the courtesan. It is fun being a courtesan – specially one favoured by the King. I get to practice my flute and dance. I play the weary soldiers tunes from the future and they kiss my fingertips in awe. I perform the dances I have learned in 16th century Russia and their jaws drop. I enjoy amusing the boys and I love the tittle-tattle with the other girls. It's not easy to tattle when you're a bearded man in robes advising an army commander. I feel comfortable here and I know big change is coming. I can smell the flames.

May 330 BCE

No room for writing. One of the girls saw my notebook and enquired what it is. "You'll find out in eight hundred years", I said – as if it was a joke.

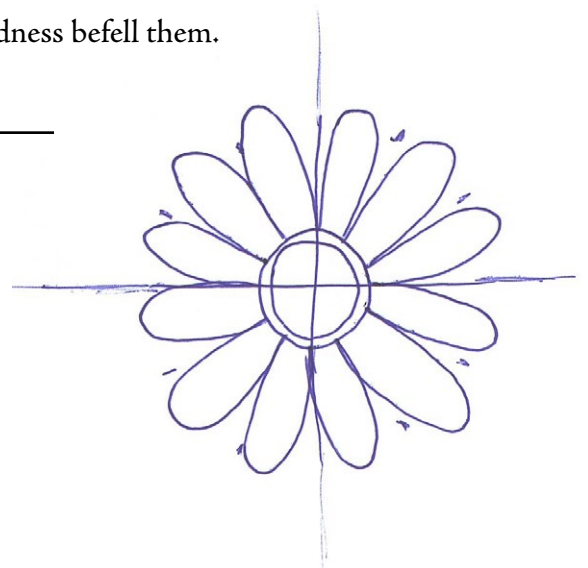
The battle is over. The Macedonians have crushed the



Persians. Alexander and the troops are busy vandalising Persepolis, slaughtering people, taking their property and wealth and burning down houses. 'They [drag] off women, clothes and all, converting their captivity into slavery'. 'As Persepolis had exceeded all other cities in prosperity, so in the same measure it now exceed[s] all others in misery'. 'The richest city under the sun', is a wall of smoke and soon a pile of ash. The streets are engulfed in fire but the palaces are spared.¹

Up on the terrace of the citadel, overlooking the burning houses and orchards, we, the courtesans, entertained Alexander and his friends with wine, pipes and dances. The terrace was on top of the fortification walls. The breeze had not changed a bit. I remembered the days I used to work there at the archive and the heated love stories I scribed on clay tablets. Now I'm not the type who when they say they are interested in thinking through erasure are only interested in *thinking* – alone in the attic or wherever. My thinking is my doing, my thoughts become actions; and that day, I was ready for some action. Up on the terrace, the troops were giddy; the more they drank the more madness befell them.

1 Diodorus, *Library of History* 17.70.



“ALEXANDER, MY KING” – I could not believe my own voice rising above all in the middle of all that madness – Alexander turned towards me. “Might you permit us women to set fire to this palace and ‘extinguish the famed accomplishments of the Persians’? We shall make this ‘the finest of all [your] feats in Asia’”.¹

Upon hearing my words, the young men screamed in joy. Someone shouted, “Light the torches”. Stench of alcohol from his mouth. Another one echoed his words and another and another.

“Light Light Light Light the the the tor the ches torch torch torch es ches es”, echoed between the terrace, the rocks and the bodies.

Soon the King was feeling the fire inside him; I could see it in his eyes and in the twitch in the corner of his lips. In a few minutes, it was happening; our torches in the air we were leading a ‘victory procession in honour of Dionysus’ ... And the rest——is history:²

Promptly many torches were gathered. Female musicians were present at the banquet, so the king led them all out for the comus to the

1 Diodorus, *Library of History* 17.72.2

2 Diodorus, 17.72.4.

sound of voices and flutes and pipes, Thaïs the courtesan leading the whole performance. She was the first, after the king, to hurl her blazing torch into the palace. As the others all did the same, immediately the entire palace area was consumed, so great was the conflagration. It was most remarkable that the impious act of Xerxes, king of the Persians, against the acropolis of Athens should have been repaid in kind after many years by one woman, a citizen of the land which had suffered it, and in sport.¹

Or at least I thought the rest was history until I discovered that people don't trust Cleitarchus, the historian who first wrote my story. They say he was too fanciful. What's wrong with being fanciful? Arrian – such a tedious writer by the way – wrote in his *Anabasis of Alexander* that the fire was Alexander's sober political decision!² He denies that I was ever there, that I pushed the torch into Alexander's hands, that I watched a hundred columns collapse and felt the smouldering fortification walls.

1 Diodorus, 17.72.5.

2 Arrian, *Anabasis* 18.178-179.

کتابخانه خان و ابی در
در سکنم و خانه می اندازم افسان

1925

Is it not necessary to distinguish the archive from that to which it is too often reduced, notably the experience of memory and the return to the origin, but also the archaic and the archaeological, the memory of the dig, in other words, the search for lost time?

Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*¹

Rethinking that night at Persepolis. I think, I was dreaming of a new way of remembering and being remembered. From ashes of history new stories will rise, I thought. I knew this was not the end of those walls but a new beginning. I knew that after the fire and outside the fortification walls the story of the deities Anāhitā and Espandārmaz that I had heard from the maid would morph into tales of the two sisters who tell stories to survive. I was there at the time of Freud's discovery of the unconscious and had inspired his analogy of burial and preservation. I told him about Wilhelm Jensen's novel and the story of the young archaeologist who fell in love with Gradiva, the woman from Pompeii who walked in ashes in the archaeologist's dream. Freud did not even thank me for bringing Wilhelm's novel to his attention – how arrogant. He was drawing an analogy between the burial of Pompeii

1 Derrida, *Archive Fever*, quoted in Caruth, 'After the End,' 33.

and the process of the mind of the young archaeologist who followed his love in the ashes of Pompeii.¹ I was thinking of the similarities between the burial of Pompeii, of Acropolis, of Persepolis and the process of all humankind's memory (is that history? I have to be careful with my terms if I am ever to publish my work). I was thinking of 'burial by ashes.'² I was planning a way to trace the past in ashes of the future and the future in ashes of the past. I thought I was invading history with flames. I wanted to be the Vesuvius of my world. (Now, in the summer of 1987, all this sounds so ridiculously pseudo-poetic).

2008

Feeling confused. Not sure what I've done with that fire. I am trying to remember but all I can remember are the flames. Nothing before or after. Only the flames. I spend hours on a software developed by the University of Chicago: OCHRE (Online Cultural and Historical Research Environment). All the discovered Persepolis Administrative Archives are documented on this software. It works slow on my computer and it is hard to decipher.

1 Freud, *Delusion and Dream*.

2 Caruth, 'After the End,' 41.

In OCHRE's catalogue of images of the clay tablets I recognise my own handwriting. The sharp smell of the royal ink comes to my mind and I'm thrown into the bastion – Ardeshir, my always nervous colleague, is noisily biting his nails in a dark corner – and out again to the computer screen. I read somewhere that there are too many tablets and too few researchers so a lot of the tablets have not been translated – maybe I should volunteer as a translator ... joking ... obviously. But what does it mean to be excavated but not understood, to be too insignificant, banal and quotidian to be translated? For the 20th century human, it is impressive that there was a system of administrative archive in place in 500 BCE but they do not need the content of the archive; they are just happy with its existence. What does this archaeological dig have to say about repression and censorship? Isn't this act of revealing archaeological objects also repressing some of their inscriptions? To me it is clear that the archaeological project is carrying the repressions of the state archive and passing them on. 10 horses, 2 sheep, tons of seed. And no one has read the stories in the archive, the ones I wrote and stealthily inserted. I cannot find them in this bloody OCHRE either.

1993 – Oriental Institute archaeologists have discovered tens of thousands of tablets and fragments in two small rooms of a bastion in the Fortification Wall. (Oriental Institute, Persepolis Fortification Archive)

1997 – The fire of Persepolis has led to the preservation of the Achaemenid Treasury Archive.

Perhaps if there was no fire, the unbaked tablets would have been lost due to natural causes – washed away with the wind & the rain. From my notes on Wieshofer, Ancient Persia.

2008

Only the tablets from the Treasury Archive were baked in the fire. Findings from the other room, the Fortification Archive, were not affected by the fire & still survived.

(Henkelman, *Other Gods, P2*)

The memoirs of the Arsonist are in relation to day 174 of Mishandled Archive and the question it poses: ‘*Survival and Disappearance (i.e. What happens after the fire)*’. The memoirs are also in conversation with a series of citational studies that the Arsonist repeatedly refers to and therefore I would like us to slowly unpack as we go along: Shoshana Felman’s ‘Fire in the Archive’ (2011) which is a response to Cathy Caruth’s paper ‘After the End: Psychoanalysis in the Ashes of History’ (2011), which is a reading together of Derrida’s *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1995), Freud’s *Delusion and Dream in Wilhelm Jensen’s Gradiva* (1907) and Wilhelm Jensen’s *Gradiva* (1903). Later in the memoirs, the Arsonist refers to a friend named Cathy, who seems to me none other than Cathy Caruth, and brings several quotes – without mentioning the source – from Caruth’s writings as well as from Felman’s. Therefore, through Caruth and Felman, the Arsonist is also informed by the works that they are responding to: Derrida’s *Archive Fever* which itself is a response to Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi’s writings on Freud in *Freud’s Moses* (1991), as well as by Freud’s explorations of the connection between the repression of the mind and the burial of the ancient city of Pompeii through the story of *Gradiva*. The Arsonist also mentions having had conversations with Freud and inspiring him in some of his discoveries – they are therefore not strangers. And finally, via Felman, Caruth, Derrida and Freud the Arsonist is engaging with the story of *Gradiva* by Wilhelm Jensen. The story which is in turn a response to a point in history: the eruption of Vesuvius and the destruction of Pompeii in 79 CE.

In this chain of re-readings of *Gradiva*, Freud, Yerushalmi, Derrida, Caruth and Felman are each shuffling in the archive of the previous person(s) and making connections between literature, history, psychoanalysis and philosophy. The authors also become characters in

the writings of future authors in the chain. Characters who help the authors investigate and articulate their thoughts. Gradiva and Herbert Hanold are characters in Jensen's novel. Jensen (via his novel and his, pre-psychoanalysis, psychoanalytical story) is a character in Freud's study. Freud is a character in the writings of Derrida, Caruth – for example where she attributes unconscious thoughts and propositions to Freud – and Yerushalmi. The final section of Yerushalmi's book is titled 'Monologue with Freud'. Here, Yerushalmi addresses the 'Professor' (Freud) directly as if Freud is present and listening. The section ends with the following request from Freud (the character, the ghost): 'Please tell me, Professor. I promise I won't reveal your answer to anyone'.¹ Thus giving Freud more of a performative life as a character, hidden in the text. Similarly, Derrida becomes a character, 'the philosopher' who dreams, in Caruth's text, and Caruth in Felman's – Felman references personal details about Caruth, acquired outside of the space of the writing (the lecture), and thus pictures Caruth for the reader (listener) as more than a faceless cited source.² The task of citation (archival research) thus gains new life through the ultimate link of all authors to the fictional character of Gradiva – a woman walking in a fictional dream. By repeating the journeys of Herbert Hanold in following the footsteps of Gradiva, these authors are thus the same as the characters through which they are writing. They all become what Caruth calls 'tracers of footprints in the ash of a catastrophe'.³ A catastrophe that can be the eruption of Vesuvius (Gradiva, Hanold), the First World War (Freud) or World War II (Derrida) and the study of trauma and the disasters of the 20th and 21st centuries (Caruth). I do not aim to dwell much in the world of catastrophes and traumas and rather allow the Arsonist to offer their reading of the catastrophic events they have participated in. What is more interesting

1 Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses*, 100.

2 Caruth, 'After the End,' 44; Felman, 'Fire in the Archive,' 63.

3 Caruth, 38.

for me here is how some of these authors – Freud and Caruth – who had become characters in others’ writings also become characters in the memoirs of the Arsonist – as friends or acquaintances – and how the Arsonist becomes a character in my writing and thinking – and I could become a character through whom others speak. The memoirs of the Arsonist shuffle between history, literature, philosophy, theory, memories and experiences. They suggest another point of entry into the process of thinking *with* Mishandled Archive. In the same way that Caruth uses Freud, Derrida and Jensen, and Freud uses Gradiva, the Arsonist becomes a vehicle for thinking alongside Mishandled Archive.

In the battle between the Greeks and the Iranians – where the Arsonist serves on both sides – there is life after fire. Like a phoenix and like history itself, the Arsonist rises from the ashes, anew, ungendered, unaged, witness, guilty, victim.



The Arsonist

When Alexander the Roman took over the land of Iran, he was filled with jealousy over the scholars and clerics of Iran, thus he gathered all the wise men and books, and translated all he wanted, and sent those to Aristotle in Greece, and whatever there was of Persians' books, he burnt, and ordered all clerics and scholars to be killed, and there was no one left who had command over essential knowledge, or who kept history, and all information and knowledge turned obsolete, or insignificant, and there is much less written of the Parthians' times, out of fear, and very few engaged with knowledge, and authored some unsubstantial books.

Anonymous chronicler,

*Mojmal al-Tawarikh wa al-Qasas*¹

This feels much more like the Alexander I know: a jealous, scrupulous, greedy strategist. But I, like you, am also confused. If Alexander had those books translated – as the anonymous chronicler suggests – I was never Thaïs, never a courtesan. Did I really push a torch into his hand? Or is Arrian, that boring historian, actually right? 'There was no

¹ Bahar, *Mojmal al-Tawarikh*, 10; my translation.

one left who [...] kept history'. I remember that historical oblivion. My arms were covered in ash. Was I a soldier who killed the scholars, or a scholar who was so afraid they could only write nonsense, or a translator unsure of their interpretation? I remember writing nonsense out of fear, not only after Alexander but many many, many more times before and after that. I remember my fearful self, trying to bear witness to and make sense of my fear. My fear of, and love for, forgetting. My fear of, and love for, remembering and being remembered.

Dezhnebesht [Fortress of Writings], Estakhr

Most Greek historians forget to mention but I remember. As the night was turning to dawn Alexander's conflagrations spread beyond Persepolis, burning the meadows, roasting the rocks. Less than a parasang away – where on a non-fiery day you could still hear the drums played in Persepolis – in the ancient city of Estakhr, a smell of burnt animal skin filled the air and I knew exactly what it was: Dezhnebesht [meaning 'Fortress of Writing', possibly another term for *library* or *archive*] was on fire and the most comprehensive copies of the Avesta were inflamed. The sacred scriptures of Zoroastrianism were turning into a smoke that was really

burning my eyes_____hoofffffffffffffff.

The Book of Arda Viraz (written between 260 - 640 CE)
recounts the incident in its first few passages:

All the Avesta and Zand, written upon prepared cow-skins, and with gold ink, was deposited in the archives, in Stakhar Papakan, (8) and the hostility of the evil-destined, wicked Ashemok, the evil-doer, brought onward Alexander, the Roman, who was dwelling in Egypt, and he burned them up. (9) And he killed several Dasturs and judges and Herbads and Mobads and upholders of the religion, and the competent and wise of the country of Iran. (10) And he cast hatred and strife, one with the other, amongst the nobles and householders of the country of Iran; (11) and self-destroyed, he fled to hell. (12). And after that, there were confusion and contention among the people of the country of Iran, one with the other.¹

I inhaled the smoke from the burnt writings and flashed onto the day Dezhnebesht was first opened. Everyone was talking about the building – a fortress that was not meant for military defence but to preserve writings – and the stairs that curled all the way to the top, and the writings in gold that no one was allowed to see. They said there were

1 *The Book of Arda Viraf*, 185-186.

Latest information,

Year of Hale, circa 230CE:
I attend regular meetings with the mobads (Zoroastrian Priests) who are trying to put fragments of the Avesta back together. If I share one thing with the Zoroastrians it is our love for fire. They are obsessed with worshipping fire and put a lot of energy into maintaining eternal flames.

The mobads claim that only 348 out of 815 chapters of the Avesta have survived (Razi, Avesta, 144-145). How much of it was lost in Alexander's fire (my fire) — how much elsewhere in other battles, quakes or floods — I don't know. I must confess that I have also witnessed the

mobads making changes ("amendments" as they rather call it) to the scripture; removing the myths and tales that are not significant to them or do not appeal to them or their strict interpretation of Zoroastrianism — they preserve what attests to their approach only

seven lock combinations to be opened before you reached the writing room. They said this way the writings would be safe. I came back to my body when I noticed two streams of tears running down my eyes. The smoke had travelled inside my body, my brain, my ears and forced itself out as tears. I rubbed my eyes and looked around to make sure no one sees me shedding tears and I saw the whole army were rubbing their eyes as if poisoned. All awe-stricken, wondering what is forcing tears out of their eyes. Is it the writings taking revenge, or the cows whose skin was turned to parchment, or the gold that was kept behind locks? The most important book of a nation is disappearing and turning into ash and smoke and I am, honestly, not sure how to feel.

Where there is an archive, there is also this vulnerability (of the archive), a vulnerability of the body of the text, the possibility of its being burnt out, erased, reduced to ashes.

Shoshana Felman, 'Fire in the Archive'¹

Drowned in the strange smell of burning skins of the Avesta I started fantasising on the struggle between Zoroastrianism and popular belief. I imagined a battle between them as if they were both animals with six legs and human heads. On

1235 CE
Since the later invasions of the armies of the Islamic State (cir. 623 CE) and the Mongols (cir. 1220) only a quarter of the Sassanid Avesta (ie only what was remembered by the mobads) is remained. And you know the mobads have a selective memory.
(Christensen, Sassanid Persia, 118)

¹ Felman, 'Fire in the Archive,' 50.

چهارمی که در غمناز هزار افسان
کوسراند منتهی در بنام هزار افسان

one side was what was burning in front of my eyes, ears and nose – what I could smell – and on the other what was not even worth being kept in locked cupboards, not even worth to be burnt later on, something that is unburnable in its unwritten nature. I have heard many tales from Sang-havak and Arenavak, the two sisters who wandered in towns, mountains and meadows and told stories. They told of magnificent beasts, fishes as big as islands and an army of girls dancing in underground fountains. These stories were ignored in the Avesta. Tales of the travelling storytellers and of the streets were sacrificed for a greater attention to religious figures and heroes.¹ I find that difficult to bear.

I smiled at the distant sight of the sparks in the sky as tears were still falling from my eyes. I, like many others, was also caught up in the *confusion* and *contention* that befell the people after the fire, as the anonymous chronicler writes. I, like many others, was not certain, am not certain, of what I know.

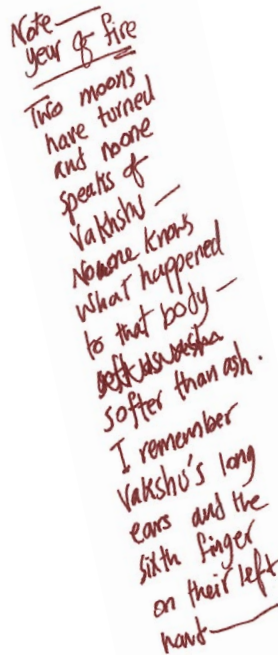
I think of writing this fire with its own ashes and I get excited by my brilliant idea. When the chaos calms down, I approach the fortress to collect some ashes. I walk in the charred tower still warm from a fire now invisible. Just

1 Beyzaei, *Hezar Afsan Kojast?*, 200-201, 230.

at the foot of the spiral stairs I see Vakhshu – a friend of mine who took care of the archive. A calm body lying on the floor, covered in ash. Some kind of fluid is still bubbling in Vakhshu's eyeballs and with a touch of my toe the whole body crumbles into ash; leaving an empty space in its place in the air. Ashes of Vakhshu mix with those of the archive they were caring for. Tomorrow's high winds will set both their ashes adrift, scatter them over the plateau and Mount Mercy.

Note to self: What would it mean for the writings of Dezhnebesht to leave a trace in the ashes which are themselves a trace of the fire?

I filled a bottle with the ashes and it is those with which I have written these lines.



Note —
Year of Fire
Two moons
have turned
and none
speaks of
Vakhshu —
No one knows
what happened
to that body —
Soft as water
softer than ash.
I remember
Vakhshu's long
ears and the
sixth finger
on their left
hand —

The Arsonist is present in the scene of many fires, in a dream-like reality, unharmed by fire, ash and time, emphasising the significance of writing in the ashes, from the ashes, plotting a destruction and writing the history of the archive through the event of burning.

The Arsonist becomes both an incinerator and a witness to the ash. They create an encounter in the ash – and with the ash – in the way that Caruth suggests. Caruth's 'After the End' engages with three kinds of witnesses: philosophical (Derrida), psychoanalytical (Freud) and literary (Jensen). She suggests that all these witnesses ultimately bear witness through the lens of the literary, and specifically a dream, that of Herbert Hanold.

Through establishing the significance of Gradiva's story in evoking responses from psychoanalysts, philosophers, scholars and critics, Caruth underscores the significance of the literary and of a simple tale of an encounter in the ashes. Because of the memoirs, the Arsonist and their story is also a literary witness – one that is later discovered, read and interpreted by others. Thus the Arsonist confirms the importance of looking through the literary lens – a method that Ravanpoor is also using through Shahrzād and Dīnāzād.



The Affairs of that One Night

Anahid Ravanpoor

On Why We Use Which Title

The generally accepted history of *The Thousand Nights and One Night* repeated by many across the globe is that the “*Arabian Nights*” is a medieval Arabic book with some stories originating from India, Iran and Asia Minor. The collection of the stories are generally thought to have been written down for the first time and compiled into a book in 14th century Syria or 15th century Cairo. These accounts easily disregard *A Thousand Tales* mentioned by Arab and Iranian writers and poets such as Ibn-an-Nadīm, Masoudi, Farrokhi Sistani, Beyhaqi, Nezami and Qatran Tabrizi long before 14th or 15th century.¹ They also disregard a 9th century Arabic manuscript discovered in 1949 in which a book titled *Alf Layla (Thousand Nights)* with the exact same frame story as the Iranian *A Thousand Tales* is described.² Considering their fascination with *The Thousand Nights and One Night*, the lack of interest in these researchers (Ulrich Marzolph, Robert Irwin, Jorge Luis Borges, Suzanne Gauch and Jalal Toufic to name a few) in *A Thousand Tales* is peculiar – for most of them *A Thousand Tales* at best ‘may’ have been a ‘prototype’ of *The Thousand Nights and One Night*.³ It is not rare to find, within these accounts, statements such as: ‘One might even go as far as stating that the Arabian Nights were created by the West’, or, ‘Despite the Arab antecedents of the tales, it is a little tempting to consider the *Nights* as primarily a work of European literature’.⁴

Challenging the work of several historians and the labelling of *The Thousand Nights and One Night* as a work of the medieval Islamic Arab era or a creation of the West, Beyzaei’s research clearly

1 Beyzaei, *Hezar Afsan Kojast?*, 21-29.

2 Abbot, ‘Ninth-Century Fragment’.

3 Irwin, *Arabian Nights*, 45.

4 Marzolph, ‘Re-Locating the Arabian Nights,’ 156; Irwin, *The Arabian Nights*, 9.

shows that *The Thousand Nights and One Night* existed both as a tradition of storytelling and as a compiled book (*A Thousand Tales*) in Iran at least as far back as 500BCE.¹ This means that whilst the Athenians were writing their tragedies, or possibly long before that, Iranians were composing and compiling *A Thousand Tales* (today's *Thousand Nights and One Night*) – with a radically different structure from Greek tragedy or comedy: a story within a story within a story composed by several people and not by a single author.² Perhaps one reason why ancient Iran lacks the equivalent of Sophocles, Euripides or Aristophanes is the value of plurality in Persian writing traditions where storytellers thrive collectively rather than as individuals.

I want to pause over the title and why I have chosen a less common translation of the title *The Thousand Nights and One Night* over the more popular *A Thousand and One Nights* or the *Arabian Nights*.

The Arabic title of the book, which is the source of the European translations, أَلْف لَيْلَة وَلَيْلَة (*Alf Layla wa Layla*) can be, perhaps more correctly, translated to *Thousand Nights* (Alf Layla) *and* (wa) *One Night* (Layla). I have spoken to Arab scholars from different countries and there does not seem to be much of a consensus around the best translation of the title. My understanding is that *Thousand and One Nights* is a poetic interpretation and *Thousand Nights and One Night* is the more literal or the *street version* (as an Arabic speaking friend put it). I am aware that my chosen title is similar to John Payne's and Powys Mathers's translation, *The Book of The Thousand Nights and One Night*. This is not because I am in favour of these translations over others but because the separation of the thousand nights from the one night is historically and conceptually important to my proposal. I will explain.

When Shahriar witnesses the repeated copulation of his wife with

1 Beyzaei's research shows that it is not only the frame story that has been translated into Arabic but also several of the nightly tales are Iranian.

2 Beyzaei, 38.

slaves and concubines in the garden of the palace, he pledges to murder a *thousand* women.¹ Thus he goes on marrying and killing a woman every day for three years. Is three years not another way of saying a thousand nights? After killing these thousand women there is no maiden left in the country to be married to Shahriar. That is when Shahrzād offers herself to the king.

Jalal Toufic writes of the impact of these acts of *jouissance* by the wife on Shahriar and how immensely he has been affected by watching them. So intense that *one* night of witnessing this *jouissance* equals a *thousand* nights of revenge. As if for a thousand nights after witnessing that event, Shahriar is seeing a repetition of the scene of copulation in his dreams. Toufic thus reads the title *A Thousand and One Nights* as referring to the night of *jouissance*, which felt as long as a thousand nights for Shahriar, and the one ‘messianic’ night of on-going storytelling by Shahrzād.² From this night of storytelling, a ‘(messianic) child’ is born to Shahrzād – a mother who is not once mentioned or seen to be pregnant – and the messiah, as we know, shall save the world.³ I am of course hesitant in calling Shahrzād’s son a messianic child because to do that is to undermine the *process* – of Shahrzād’s repeated storytelling in order to bring Shahriar back to sanity – and understate the power of repetition, progression and dialogue in favour of a *product* or a (messianic) son.⁴ Citing Borges and his musings over the title *The Thousand and One Nights*, Toufic writes:

Borges too errs when he writes: “Why were there first a thousand [the apparently Persian version: *Hazar Afsana*, the *Thousand Tales*] and later a thousand and one?”⁵ It is confounding that despite all his flair

1 Not only her acts of *jouissance* are repeated but also the scene of Shahriar’s wife betraying him is a repetition of a similar earlier scene by the wife of Shahriar’s brother, Shah Zaman.

2 Toufic, *What is the Sum*, 4.

3 Toufic, *Two or Three Things*, 103.

4 In some editions Shahrzād bears three children.

5 YZ: Is Toufic’s ‘the apparently Persian version’ meant to cast yet another shadow on *A Thousand Tales*?

Borges should miss the displacement from tale in the Persian version to night in the Arabic one:

I consider that the first title refers to the stories Shahrazâd tells, while the second refers to the nights, the one thousand nights of the one thousand unjustly murdered previous one-night wives of King Shahrayâr plus his night with Shahrazâd, a night that is itself like a thousand nights.¹

Two things that Borges and Toufic are missing here is that, firstly, the title of the initial Arabic translation of *A Thousand Tales* was *A Thousand Nights*, centuries before it became a thousand and one.² This, *A Thousand Nights*, was the common name for the Persian *Hezar Afsân* (literally translated to *Alf Khurafa* in Arabic) amongst Arabs. Secondly, the Persian *A Thousand Tales* had less than two hundred tales which were spread across a thousand nights.³ It is therefore inaccurate for Toufic to say that in *A Thousand Tales*, thousand is referring to Shahrzâd's tales but in the *Thousand and One Nights* the thousand is the murdered wives of the king and the one night is Shahrzâd's night. I fully embrace Toufic's emphasis on the importance of the one thousand dead wives of the king and the need to find a place for those thousand women in the title and the stories. Nonetheless, his differentiation between tales and nights is muddled by several historical accounts.

I also want to add another proposal into this pool of readings of the title *Thousand Nights and One Night*. Could we imagine that the thousand nights are the nights of storytelling of Shahrzâd of *A Thousand Tales* and the one night is the night when the frame story is told and heard? In this reading, Shahrzâd of *A Thousand Tales* demands the stories that led to her first night with the king (i.e. the frame story) to be counted as one of her tales and thus make them a thousand and one nights. Artists and writers who

1 Toufic, *Two or Three Things*, 101; brackets in the original.

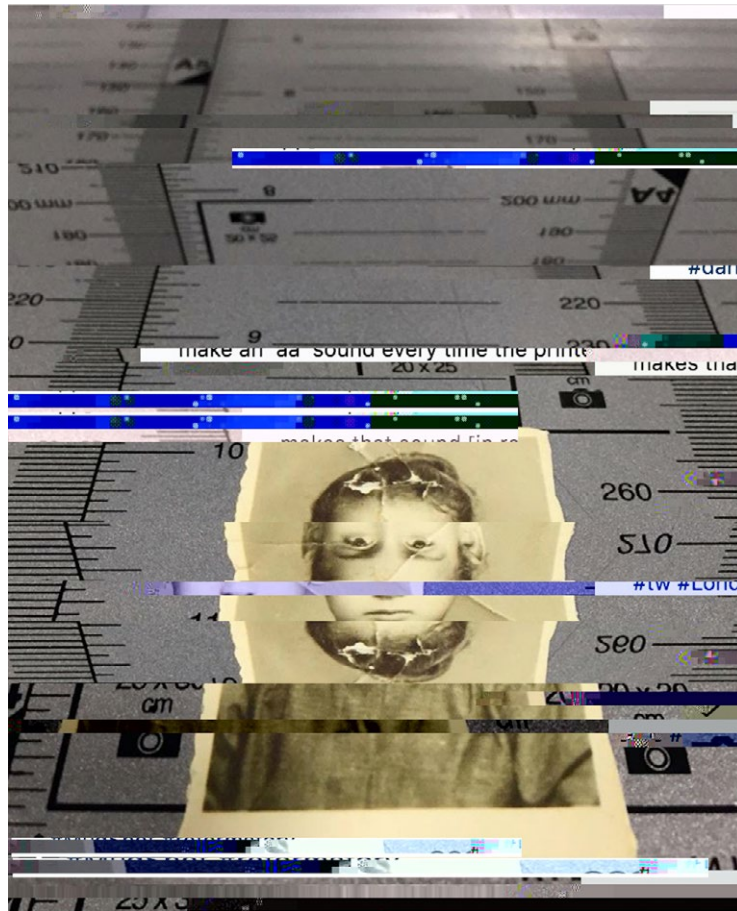
2 See Abbot, 'Ninth-Century Fragment'.

3 Ibn-an-Nadim, *The Fihrist*, 714.

use strategies of Shahrzād in their works are responding to this “one night”. They focus on the night, and the tale, that holds the making of all the strategies of resistance, creativity and criticism that are crucial to the book. This is the night that I will keep separate as the *One Night* in the title to reassert the importance of the frame story.

I am hoping that by using a seemingly displaced version of the title I can unfix an overly repeated and accepted interpretation of this book. None of the readings into the title are or need to be final. So if every time I say *The Thousand Nights and One Night* you feel there is something wrong, that feeling is desirable in my work and I want us to feel that discomfort in order to be reminded that we are looking at the book with fresh eyes.

The Arabian Nights, I will quickly mention, is a shortened version of a title that the first anonymous English translation of the book in the 18th century conjured up for it: *The Arabian Nights' Entertainment*. As already mentioned, this title has nothing to do with the Arabic title *Alf Layla Wa Layla*. It disregards not only the original Persian book but also its transnationality and adaptability and only satisfies the Orientalists' lust for a wondrous East. I will therefore avoid using this title.



Traces of Blood in the Machine



Wang Shu

{~/Checkpoint 10.03.02}

{go// Tianjin-office-CY2 environment}

Thirty years ago. Tianjin, China.

It is spring 2087. Average weather is around 32 °C [cmd// L-Palm on skull]. This is my shared office space. From that window over there you can see {optn// the iTouch natural reserve / KaiTong Stadium / Feeto Library}. I am involved in an e-history project titled *Violence and Blood: Children in Early 21st Century Online Media* [cmd// Roll R-Indx]. The project, I can now admit, is a rather tedious e-history project. The whole day we are dealing with datasets, multi-class classifications, machinic visuals and codes, codes, codes and more codes. Owing to the ‘pervasive computer technologies’, since the early 1990s, echoes of all human identity were shaped into ‘data doubles or data-bodies’ believed to supersede physical and material identities {optn// ref.1}. As a young researcher interested in everything but the task assigned to them, I spend most of my days lost in the web-archives of obsolete technologies, early century social media, apps and half legible data-bodies, gathering casual datasets for potential future experiments of my own [cmd// Roll R-Indx]. Mobile media had been blooming in our era of research, the early 21st century. The proliferation of mobile devices and camera phones at that time meant that a young person like me who came across these coincidental digital archives many decades later, could easily spend, or should I say waste, hours and hours of time screening through thumbnails of strictly rectangular – at best square – photographs [cmd// Pump L-Cheek]. And that’s what I did – until my eyes were chopping cherries and chillies. Trust me, physically looking at screen archives burns the eyes [cmd// Pump L-Cheek].

{go// Tianjin office CK5 environment}

1 Bay-Cheng, “When this You See”, 49.

In one of these many eye-burning hours of convenience sampling, I came across #YouShallSeeBlood; a hashtag with only a dozen assigned contents. {~/It's ok, many people don't know what hashtags were} Hashtags are a content tagging and categorisation system that can be traced back to the early social media in around 2007. These were searchable keywords that followed the hash (#) symbol and could be used to connect all content posted using the similar tag. In other words, a user's click on each hashtag would agglomerate all content that was tagged on that platform using the same keywords [cmd// Pump L-Cheek]. Each hashtag would therefore connect a potentially infinite number of posts by different users. For example, #WhatHappensTomorrow could congregate videos of Duran Duran's [cmd// Roll R-Indx] Simon Lebon [cmd// Pump L-Cheek] and photos of: cat resting on a box, bicycle in Amsterdam, pencilled schedule, silhouettes by the beach, cypress tree in cemetery, pillows and cutlery in hotel room [cmd// Pump L-Cheek]. Hashtags have been out of use for decades but since many older archives rely heavily on them, I had to be familiar with their function. [cmd// R-Mid-Indx knuckle tap]

Let's have a look at that screen. You can wear protective glasses if it hurts your eyes [cmd// L-Palm forward]. The earliest content related to #YouShallSeeBlood is from 2017 that means the hashtag has been made in that year {optn// examples denied}. Vital data tracing clues have been erased in the 2059 PDGA Act [cmd// Roll R-Indx]. I have some hope in replicating overlapping data subsets but even then it will take me forever to rebuild the mini-thumbnail into the full file with this fraction of an archaic code {~ offer visitor puzzle>>recode}:

```
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JiT...j, Êd°Ö Ø?Äß^†%u†±Äë“ú Á#5[äCíh äÇTöh]
```



```
{go// Tianjin-office-CY4 environment}
```

```
{optn// install fatigue5.9 / headache0.8 / dizziness4.6
```

```
/ continue without emotion supply} [cmd// Punch Heart] Forty nine  
hours and only two short breaks later—and what do I have? This. [cmd//  
L-Palm forward] An image so glitch-full that it can hardly be read. Look.  
{merge// #YouShallSeeBlood image} Seriously, what is this? {optn// offer  
visitor conversation} {optn// end visitor conversation: You're  
right} Looks like here is a monochrome photo of a young girl and here a metallic  
surface with metric and old imperial length measurement units [cmd// Roll  
R-Indx]. I wonder what it could be.
```

```
{~/Checkpoint 10.03.03}
```

Unsurprisingly, considering the team of researchers I am working with {~/examples-denied} {optn// access fantasy token}, neither the little girl's photo nor the #YouShallSeeBlood hashtag make it into the final *Violence and Blood: Children in Early 21st Century Online Media* project. The project manager {~/examples-denied} believes we have enough material where there is actual depiction of real blood [16+cmd// Pump L-Cheek] so there is no place for content that only refers to a vague probability of blood. They are right, there is no real blood in any of my content, but that is what fascinates me {optn// the probability of blood and violence not the actuality of it / the story of blood rather than its real image} [cmd// Mid-Indx knuckle tap].

2080s were all about moving on so I buried these inklings along with many others and moved on.

```
{go// Techtaton-UT9 environment}
```

Today, seamless documentation of the minutiae of life into Redeemable Codes which you would know as RC [cmd// Roll R-Indx] is an accepted, even mundane, reality of daily life in most parts of the world. We can review any moment in the past thirty years in a blink of an eye and experience that moment via our choice of visual, aural, tactile and olfactory signals [cmd// Pump L-Cheek]. The

craze for this abundance of organised digital documentation started less than a hundred years ago with what is now known as the mobile revolution. Many associate the booming of the mobile revolution with the production and mass distribution of the iPhone in 2007. The original iPhone was a pocket-sized mini-computer with multi-touch screen [cmd// Pump L-Cheek], telecommunication and cellular network connections [cmd// Roll R-Indx], photo, video and voice recording functions [cmd// Pump L-Cheek], mathematical calculation power [cmd// Pump L-Cheek] and location trackers [cmd// Pump L-Cheek] along with several other features that became available to users through the installation of applications [cmd// Pump L-Cheek]. The iPhone was not the first of what was known as smartphones but many of its features, including a keyboard-free touch screen and a high quality camera were a novelty at the time. {~/offer visitor conversation} How do you feel about holding an early iPhone and flicking through some photos on it? [cmd// L-Palm forward] {optn// end visitor conversation: I know, it feels so romantic / Imagine carrying that with you everywhere / Pretty heavy, huh?}

Following the design and release of the iPhone by Apple Inc. [cmd// Roll R-Indx], several other tech companies designed their own smartphones with relatively similar functions [cmd// Pump L-Cheek]. The number of smartphones proliferated to an extent that by a decade later, in 2017, 8.5 billion smartphones had been sold to consumers globally {optn// ref.1} and by 2021 there were more smartphones on earth than humans {optn// ref.2}. The iPhone's many versions continued to dominate the market until the late 2020s when they were overtaken by the first Orlox [cmd// Pump L-Cheek].

1 Holst, 'Number of Smartphones.'

2 Clark, 'More Smartphones than Humans.'



A Warm Water Situation

The Arsonist

The Arabs immediately pounced upon all books they considered needless or harmful. They ravaged all monuments of literature; the merest traces of them were barely able [to] reach us.

Goethe, *West-East Divan*¹

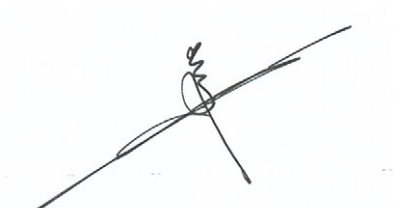
651 CE

Estakhr, the city formerly known for Dezhnebesht (the Fortress of Writing) is now known as the birthplace of Yazdgerd III the Sassanid king who is now on the run from the Muslim army with his whereabouts unknown – to me at least ... well it's not like I have tried to locate him; I could not be less interested in the man.

I return to Estakhr, 'the site of disaster' and 'literature,' 'to the site of literature as archive.'² I return to contemplate what happened years before unsure of whether I want to retain or erase my memory of it. The wish for a contemplative return, for time to rethink and reconsider and examine the past, soon proved to be just a fanciful dream. A simplistic nostalgia that was shredded to pieces the moment I set foot

1 Goethe, *West-East Divan*, 193.

2 Caruth, 'After the End,' 37.



یادداشت‌های
حکایت‌ها

in the city. New disasters came like a slap in the face and brought me back to the reality of the now, of the when and where I was.

Arabs have attacked Estakhr for the second time since 649 CE to suppress the civilians' revolt and, I suppose, implement Islam. The Sassanids lost the capital, Ctesiphon, to them at their first attack and have lost control of everything since then. The King is on the run and the level of chaos is incomprehensible.

Yesterday, Abdallah Ibn Amir, the head of the Muslim army, who seems annoyed at the fact that he had to come directly to Estakhr after another battle, swore that he will kill so many in Estakhr that all roads would run with blood. He declared that shedding Ajam (non-Arab but mostly meaning Persian) blood is *halal* (allowed) so the battle got really out of control. Dead bodies at every step. Nearly forty thousand identified bodies but somehow the blood wasn't running down the streets as the commander wished until a group of thugs started running warm water on the blood. Maybe they were cleaning the streets maybe they wanted the blood to run just to fulfil the promises of Abdallah Ibn Amir. Either way, warm watery blood was running down every alley.¹

1 Zarinkoob, *Two Centuries of Silence*, chap. 3; Crone, *Nativist*

I was there in Madain (Ctesiphon), the capital, after the conquest. Never got round to writing about it at the time. A letter from Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas, the appointed Arab governor of Ctesiphon which was intended for Omar, the caliph, coincidentally landed in my hands. He was asking what he should do with the abundance of books they have found in the conquered Sassanian metropolis. I wrote back and said,

‘throw them all in the river. If what appears in these books gives guidance, then God has sent us the Quran, which is a most superior guide, and if in them there is nothing but cause for deception, God has indeed saved us from their evil.’¹

signed *Omar ibn al-Khattāb*

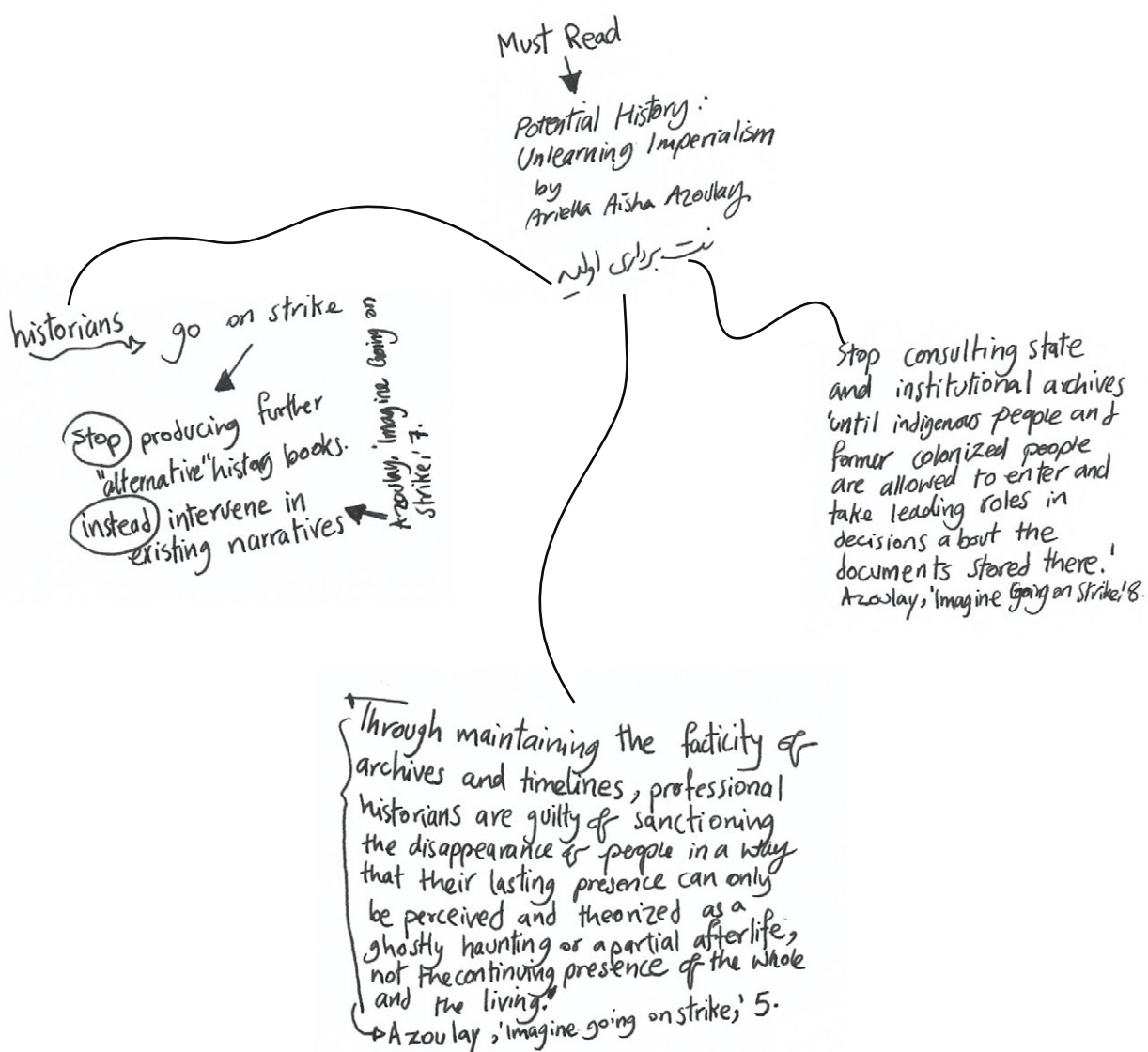
And so the governor ordered all books to be thrown into rivers or burnt.² It was rather strange how this incident was barely mentioned by future historians – those were strange times. I feel a bit awkward for pretending to be the Caliph but I needed this to happen for my research. Currently, I am looking into languages and their survival methodologies,

Prophets, 6.

1 Zarinkoob, chap. 3.

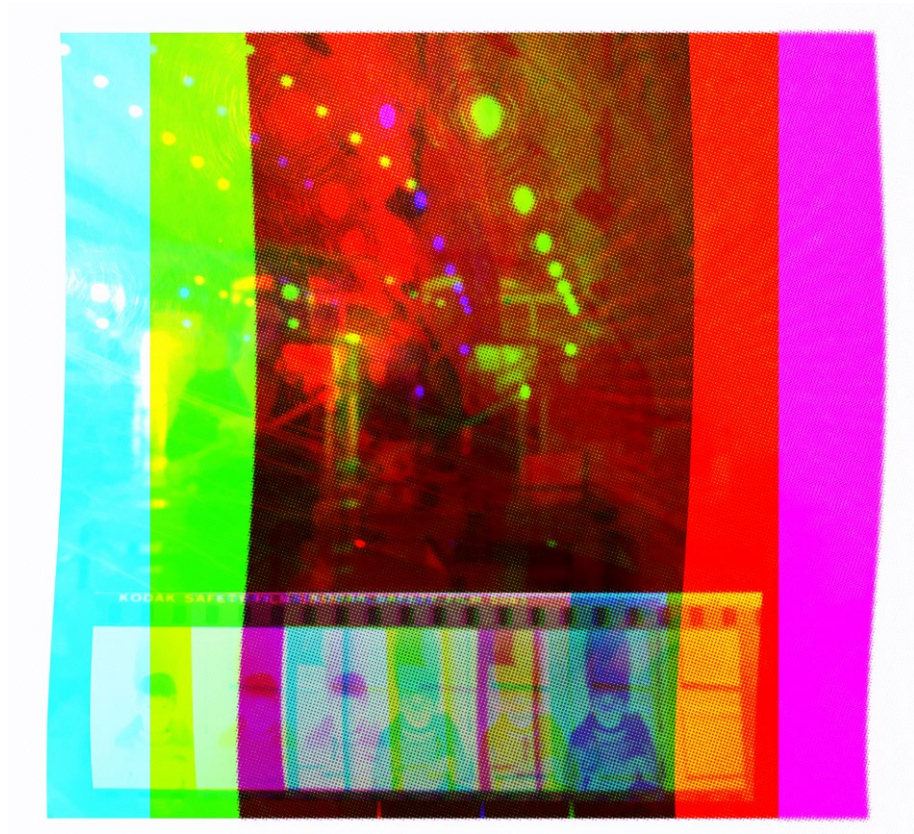
2 Zarinkoob, chap. 3.

translation and transformation. Running some experiments
on Middle Persian language at the moment.



The Arsonist might be seen as the personification of the 'destructive drive' as Derrida defines it: a muted drive that is working against the memory of the archive without leaving any trace. Derrida also uses the terms 'death drive' and 'aggression drive' for this drive. I would, however, continue with the destructive drive as I believe it offers a more open-ended approach that can result in trajectories of thought that don't necessarily land under the heavy weight of death. This destructive drive, Derrida describes, is 'anarchic' or 'anarchontic' meaning it is going against the rules and the *archons* (the guardians of the archive). This drive 'always operates in silence' and 'never leaves any archive of its own'. It destroys the archive and destroys any trace of its own and is therefore 'anarchivic' [antiarchival] and 'archiviolithic' [an archive that violates the stone (i.e. rules and law)].¹ The Arsonist, as the personification of the destructive drive, is at work in destroying archives, although, I would suggest, that destruction, for the Arsonist, does not equal *death* and there are elements of life, liveness, change and hope in their decisions and actions. Similar to Derrida's destructive drive and therefore to the archive itself, the Arsonist is against the originary law and primary principle and therefore destroys the principal principle through destroying the archive and destroying traces of their own presence.

1 Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 14.



A Jolly Eulogy for
Instagram



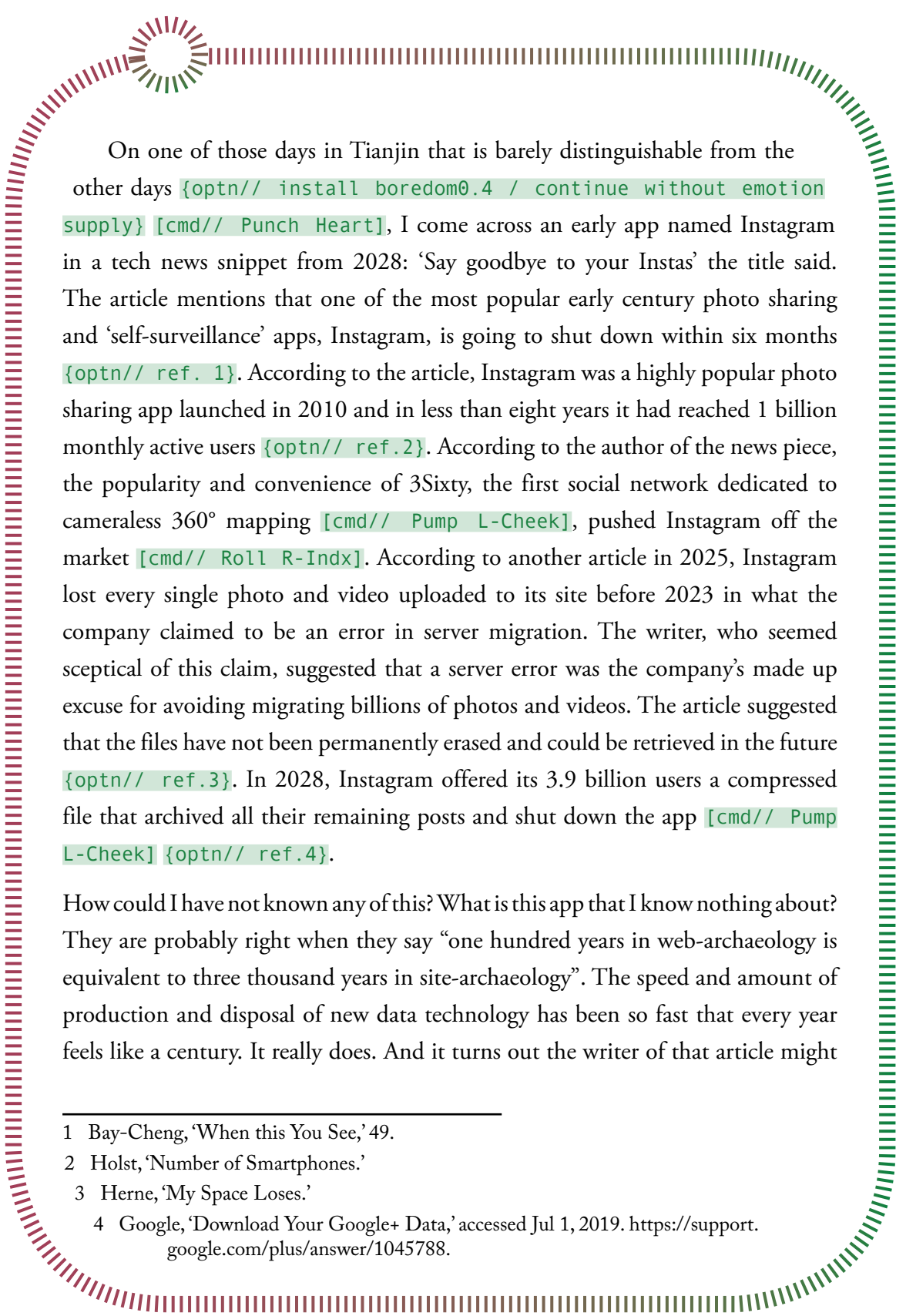
Wang Shu

{~/Checkpoint 10.03.04}

{go// Tianjin-ETDA-JH5 environment}

It is now 2095. Tianjin Economic-Technological Development Area. It's 44 °C outside the Area [cmd// L-Palm on skull] but the aircoils keep it to 20 °C inside and outside within the territory of the Area. [cmd// L-Palm on skull] {optn// offer visitor walk in Tianjin-EDTA-JH5}. My passion for obsolete technology and born-digital heritage [cmd// Roll R-Indx] has led me to become a certified web-archaeologist. If you're wondering what that is, web-archaeology started as a branch of media-archaeology in the early 2030s [cmd// Roll R-Indx]. The fast development of internet technology meant that the field expanded so soon that it could no more sit under the umbrella of media archaeology and it had to become its own field with several sub-branches. Although the web does not exist any longer and many web-archaeologists focus on forms of data excavation other than the web, the term *web-archaeology* has stuck around to this date. Today, web-archaeologists are people who approach the digital remnants since the age of the internet [cmd// Roll R-Indx] with an 'archaeological imagination', that is to say they creatively approach these remains in order to decode, restore and revive them {optn// ref. 1}. Web-archaeologists experiment with imagining several entangled and interfering narratives of the past through born-digital heritage by never fully yielding to any singular possibility of the past. The good thing for me is that as a certified web-archaeologist, I still get to spend a lot of time on obsolete technology and unreadable algorithms but this time I get paid for it ... Hi Jennifer. This is Jennifer, the [host updated past position] {optn// offer visitor conversation} [cmd// Bend L-Thumb].

1 Shanks, *Archaeological Imagination*. The term 'archaeological imagination' was elaborated by Michael Shanks in 2012 but has since been developed, taken up and reshaped particularly by late twenty-first century web-archaeologists.



On one of those days in Tianjin that is barely distinguishable from the other days {optn// install boredom0.4 / continue without emotion supply} [cmd// Punch Heart], I come across an early app named Instagram in a tech news snippet from 2028: ‘Say goodbye to your Instas’ the title said. The article mentions that one of the most popular early century photo sharing and ‘self-surveillance’ apps, Instagram, is going to shut down within six months {optn// ref. 1}. According to the article, Instagram was a highly popular photo sharing app launched in 2010 and in less than eight years it had reached 1 billion monthly active users {optn// ref.2}. According to the author of the news piece, the popularity and convenience of 3Sixty, the first social network dedicated to cameraless 360° mapping [cmd// Pump L-Cheek], pushed Instagram off the market [cmd// Roll R-Idx]. According to another article in 2025, Instagram lost every single photo and video uploaded to its site before 2023 in what the company claimed to be an error in server migration. The writer, who seemed sceptical of this claim, suggested that a server error was the company’s made up excuse for avoiding migrating billions of photos and videos. The article suggested that the files have not been permanently erased and could be retrieved in the future {optn// ref.3}. In 2028, Instagram offered its 3.9 billion users a compressed file that archived all their remaining posts and shut down the app [cmd// Pump L-Cheek] {optn// ref.4}.

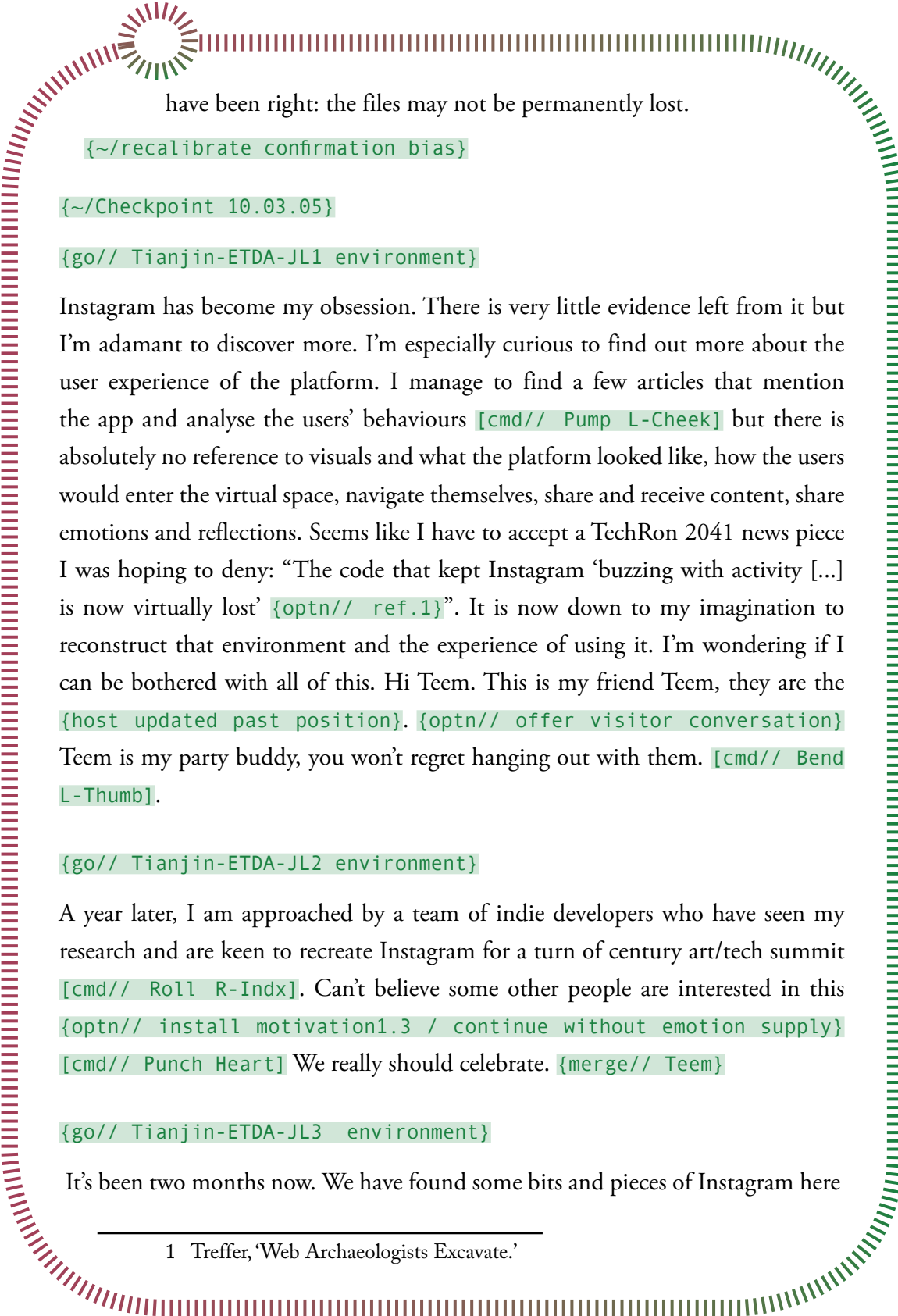
How could I have not known any of this? What is this app that I know nothing about? They are probably right when they say “one hundred years in web-archaeology is equivalent to three thousand years in site-archaeology”. The speed and amount of production and disposal of new data technology has been so fast that every year feels like a century. It really does. And it turns out the writer of that article might

1 Bay-Cheng, ‘When this You See,’ 49.

2 Holst, ‘Number of Smartphones.’

3 Herne, ‘My Space Loses.’

4 Google, ‘Download Your Google+ Data,’ accessed Jul 1, 2019. <https://support.google.com/plus/answer/1045788>.



have been right: the files may not be permanently lost.

`{~/recalibrate confirmation bias}`

`{~/Checkpoint 10.03.05}`

`{go// Tianjin-ETDA-JL1 environment}`

Instagram has become my obsession. There is very little evidence left from it but I'm adamant to discover more. I'm especially curious to find out more about the user experience of the platform. I manage to find a few articles that mention the app and analyse the users' behaviours `[cmd// Pump L-Cheek]` but there is absolutely no reference to visuals and what the platform looked like, how the users would enter the virtual space, navigate themselves, share and receive content, share emotions and reflections. Seems like I have to accept a TechRon 2041 news piece I was hoping to deny: "The code that kept Instagram 'buzzing with activity [...]' is now virtually lost' `{optn// ref.1}`". It is now down to my imagination to reconstruct that environment and the experience of using it. I'm wondering if I can be bothered with all of this. Hi Teem. This is my friend Teem, they are the `{host updated past position}`. `{optn// offer visitor conversation}` Teem is my party buddy, you won't regret hanging out with them. `[cmd// Bend L-Thumb]`.

`{go// Tianjin-ETDA-JL2 environment}`

A year later, I am approached by a team of indie developers who have seen my research and are keen to recreate Instagram for a turn of century art/tech summit `[cmd// Roll R-Indx]`. Can't believe some other people are interested in this `{optn// install motivation1.3 / continue without emotion supply}` `[cmd// Punch Heart]` We really should celebrate. `{merge// Teem}`

`{go// Tianjin-ETDA-JL3 environment}`

It's been two months now. We have found some bits and pieces of Instagram here

1 Treffer, 'Web Archaeologists Excavate.'

and there but nothing close to an organised archive. Things are going very slow. I have been trying to retrieve data via the hashtag #ChildrenOfInstagram. It's like the data has been splashed into the atmosphere. This is the tenth day I have spent on putting together fragments of what I hope is a single image that I found through rebuilding codes via #ChildrenOfInstagram.

```
{optn// install headache0.2 / despair2.6 / continue without emotion supply}
```

So far, I have found this in the code: 'AppleiPhone 6 back camera 4.15mm f/2.2'. So the image was taken on an iPhone. The image is split into many bits.

```
{optn// offer visitor puzzle>>jigsaw}
```

There's a mahogany section ... These things look like old shimmering 20th century light bulbs... These could be parts of a person, a face? Hands? And there's these monochrome fragment too: doors, blank space, the face of the same boy twice. It seems like these bits were cut off from a contact sheet where multiple photos were printed on a single sheet directly from the film `[cmd// Roll R-Indx]`. And there's also this bit with some writings. `{optn// offer visitor clue}` Kodak ... Safety ... Film ... 5063 ... yes, you're right. That's what it says. Kodak Safety Film 5063, product of the Eastman Kodak company `[cmd// Roll R-Indx]` first produced in 1909 as a replacement for the old spontaneous combustible nitrate films `[cmd// Roll R-Indx]`. This particular model, 5063, is estimated to be from the 1970s and 1980s. `{optn// offer jigsaw puzzle feedback: Well done, that was fantastic / Don't worry, no one gets it}` `{~/recalibrate automation bias}`

```
{~/Checkpoint 10.03.06}
```

After ten days of shuffling things around I seem to have the image as a whole, as much as possible – some bits of codes are untransformable to visuals. The result is a lowQ, naturally smudged photo `{optn// enter image environment}`. There is an old 20th century monochrome photo (a boy by the door) layered on top of a 21st century looking setting where a woman in black is majestically lighting wax taper candles `[cmd// Roll R-Indx]`. Shimmering rows of light on the ceiling are now lined up. A mahogany hue is cast over the surroundings. The image in its semi-complete form immediately throws me back to the little girl I have



seen years before. The one tagged with #YouShallSeeBlood

`{go// match environments}`. The one I still wonder if they have seen

blood, or have been killed, assaulted, witness to a murder or nothing. The one who carries the story of blood not its tangible stains. In the absence of any systematic readable metadata, the visual similarities amongst the two pieces are uncanny. Both images are blurred, pixelated and partly corrupt like most of the remaining early web-based documents `[cmd// Pump L-Cheek]`. Nonetheless, I do have an important but limited metadata: both photos have been shot on an iPhone 6, Model A1586, designed in California and assembled in China.

`{~/optional// 16+}`

`{go// Foxconn-HI4 environment}`

I hear you're into off-tour, well, this is a little off-tour – it's about my grandmother. My grandmother used to have a photo of one of her great aunts – Ah yee Daiyu.

`{merge// ah-yee-daiyu-image}` This is Ah yee Daiyu. Ah yee Daiyu was

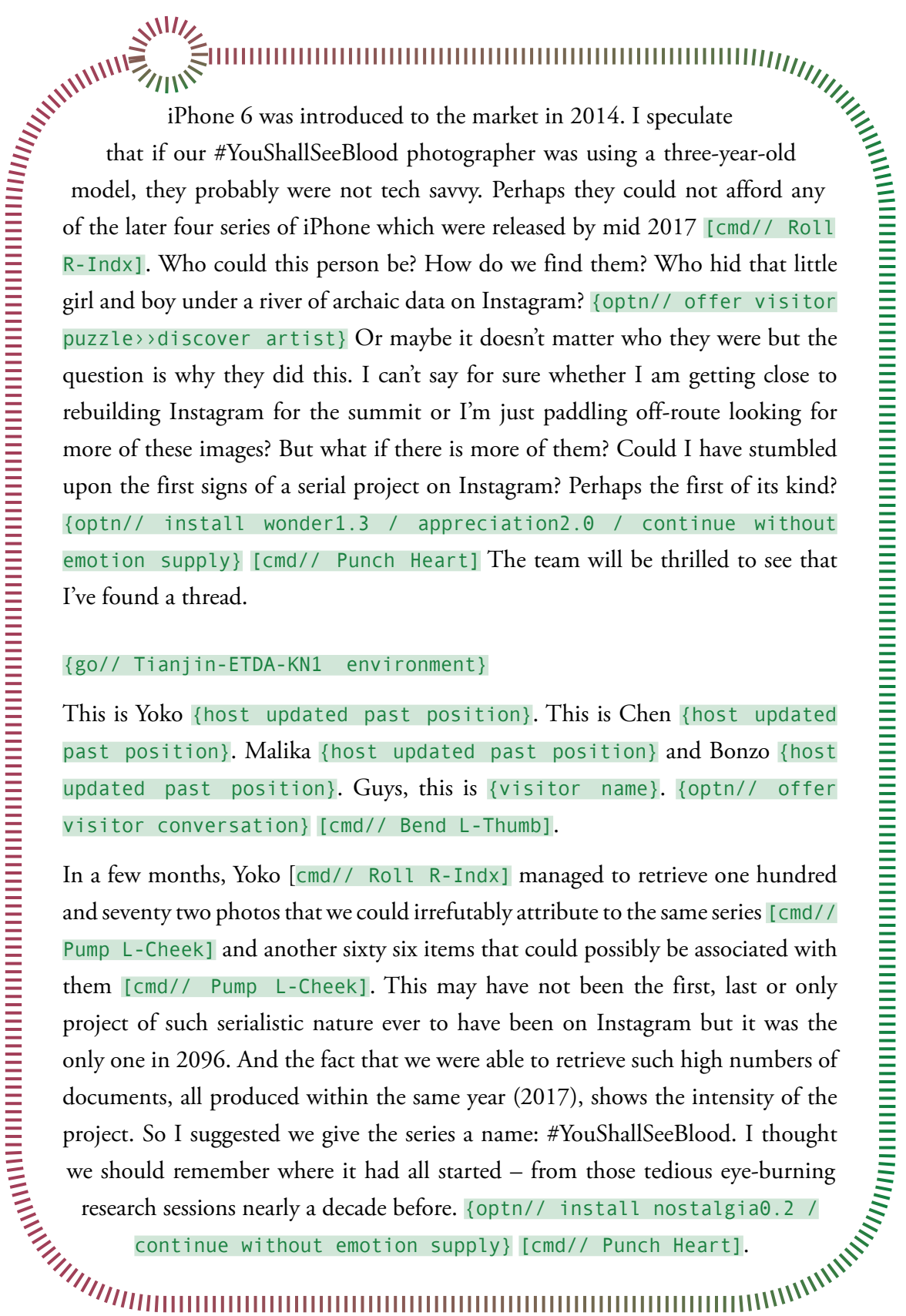
seventeen when they moved from their family home in Sichuan to Longhua for work. This is their shared dorm in Foxconn in Longhua where they worked for Apple's iPhone factory. The bunk bed on the top with the towel hanging from it is where Daiyu used to sleep. After five years of working at Foxconn, Ah yee Daiyu and twelve other workers at the factory committed suicide. They threw themselves off a dormitory tower block and ended their lives `[cmd// Roll`

`R-Idx]` `{optn// ref.1}`. "Her name never made it into the news", my grandma would say, "remember, her name is Daiyu, Daiyu, Daiyu". Grandma used to make me repeat that name: "Daiyu, Daiyu, Daiyu". As a child I never liked that. "They only called them the thirteen people ... not her name, never her name" `{optn//`

`deny more info}`. After this incident, all sweatshops and factories in China implemented suicide nets on their windows which led to new forms of suicide among the workers `[cmd// Pump L-Cheek]`. Ah yee Daiyu was the first one in our family who committed suicide at a tech factory but surely not the last.

`{~/optional// 16+/end}`

1 Merchant, 'Life and Death.'



iPhone 6 was introduced to the market in 2014. I speculate that if our #YouShallSeeBlood photographer was using a three-year-old model, they probably were not tech savvy. Perhaps they could not afford any of the later four series of iPhone which were released by mid 2017 [cmd// Roll R-Idx]. Who could this person be? How do we find them? Who hid that little girl and boy under a river of archaic data on Instagram? {optn// offer visitor puzzle>>discover artist} Or maybe it doesn't matter who they were but the question is why they did this. I can't say for sure whether I am getting close to rebuilding Instagram for the summit or I'm just paddling off-route looking for more of these images? But what if there is more of them? Could I have stumbled upon the first signs of a serial project on Instagram? Perhaps the first of its kind? {optn// install wonder1.3 / appreciation2.0 / continue without emotion supply} [cmd// Punch Heart] The team will be thrilled to see that I've found a thread.

{go// Tianjin-ETDA-KN1 environment}

This is Yoko {host updated past position}. This is Chen {host updated past position}. Malika {host updated past position} and Bonzo {host updated past position}. Guys, this is {visitor name}. {optn// offer visitor conversation} [cmd// Bend L-Thumb].

In a few months, Yoko [cmd// Roll R-Idx] managed to retrieve one hundred and seventy two photos that we could irrefutably attribute to the same series [cmd// Pump L-Cheek] and another sixty six items that could possibly be associated with them [cmd// Pump L-Cheek]. This may have not been the first, last or only project of such serialistic nature ever to have been on Instagram but it was the only one in 2096. And the fact that we were able to retrieve such high numbers of documents, all produced within the same year (2017), shows the intensity of the project. So I suggested we give the series a name: #YouShallSeeBlood. I thought we should remember where it had all started – from those tedious eye-burning research sessions nearly a decade before. {optn// install nostalgia0.2 / continue without emotion supply} [cmd// Punch Heart].



**How'd you say 'peace'
in Hebrew?**

Arsenal cafe, quality dry cleaners, PFC, chicken burger kebab, 2.29 per kg, 50p each, 2.99 per kg, enjoy coffee in our back garden, HAIR CUT, PUSH, two men giving haircuts to two men, massive poster of a man with excessively brushed and oiled light brown hair, short on the sides, slightly longer and volumed on the top, Specialists in Ethiopian Cuisine, Cafe, Take Away, PUSH, Whitechapel 106, double decker bus, Salam Butcher's, Mediterranean Grocery, colourful flyer on sign post, music and food festival, a shop full of junk, unopened, not even nearly ready to be opened, maybe recently closed down, out of business, buckets of paint, grey chairs, three oranges in a plate, a blue jacket on one of the chairs, "sound of waves crashing" on the glass window front, lots of extension cables, junk mail everywhere, zebra crossing to the middle of the street, zebra crossing back to the same side, uneven ground, three teenage girls in different shades of pink see each other and scream, and scream, and scream, for much longer than anyone could be comfortable with, even themselves, Fish and Cook, open, printers and stationers, OPEN, PUSH, I'm sick of reading every readable thing on the street, can't help it, had it since I learned how to read, a man hole is open, a man in fluorescent yellow is looking into it, a traffic cone – if that's what it's called – between me and the man, what if I could jump into a manhole and out, like in Mary Poppins, then jump over the cone, two steps on the edge of the wall, back on the uneven pavement, Top Up

Your Oyster Card Here, live well for less, mini cab, gutter cleaners, 020 3397 82, plumbers, amazing offers, 6 spicy wings, 2.00, silver chairs, lots more offers inside, three of the cement floor tiles are cracked, vague lines of a half-disappeared graffiti on the blue wall, today is pretty warm, over 21 degrees, woman across the road with two buggies full of boxes and bags, she's having trouble pushing the buggies, blonde punk hair, a two-year-old in her arms, another woman runs into her, it looks like they know each other but haven't seen each other in a long time, good, she's sorted, she has help, I can move on, Lyca mobile, clear plastic containers, large, medium, small, No Stopping Mon-Sat 7am-7pm, 3.99, 9.99, All Purpose Garden Soil, shopping trolleys, How'd you say 'peace' in Hebrew? Clothes hangers in nine colours, packs of ten, WAIT, press here, WAIT, what was that? How'd you say 'peace' in Hebrew? I take two steps back. Handwritten note on a piece of paper stuck on a bollard. Bollard, that's a good word, bollard. The black fine liner note says:

'How'd you say 'peace' in Hebrew?, Blackstock Rd – Homix' (Homix, that's the shop selling soil and plastic stuff),

23 °C

dance: I bend my knees a bit, twist my hips and throw them gently to the right, then to the left, I sit on the mosaic floor shake my head and smile. The people not walking are the shopkeeper sitting by the shop & the guy selling Evening Standard'.

I thought Evening Standard is free.

It also said, in blue:

'149/365, www.tarafatehi.com, keep this, #MishandledArchive'.¹

On the back is an old black and white photograph of a sulking hamster-cheeked little girl in the arms of a man. No idea what this is, I put it in my bag. White Raleigh, bright blue Pinnacle, silver hybrid Dawes, 153 Moorgate, WAIT, Red Bull gives you wings, 150 metres, factory pricing, Twelve Pins, Finsbury Park.

is it a problem if i take ibuprophone 6 days a week? Showing results for is it a problem if i take ibuprofen 6 days a week? Ibuprofen for adults: painkiller - NHS. Train and bus rides are my favourite reading time. 149. Top floor, front seat on the right side so I have the view in front of me and there's no one behind me talking on the phone. Tap on Instagram. Search: #MishandledArchive. Lots of posts come up. Almost all from the same account. The last one was posted yesterday, another photo apparently left near Finsbury Park. Black and white passport photo of a woman in a scarf with thin trimmed eyebrows on a wall painting of fierce eyes and brows (also black and white), another temperature, another dance, and a list of hashtags. I tap #WallPainting: a giant wall painting of an elephant, yellow and orange, a woman next to it looking tiny; a tree with leaves and blossoms hanging over a bridge; Gandhi in patches of colour, woman in namaste pose next to him;

person in black T-shirt on a high ladder painting a wall white; inspector Gadget with a magnifying glass looking down on the street; tourist pointing at a pelican, 'Dushi is a common word in Papiamentu. The word has a variety of meanings. Calling someone 'dushi' means 'sweetheart', 'babe', or even 'sexy'. You also use it for tasty food or to describe good things in life', leather chair on the side; a house painted all the way to the top with psychedelic patterns and a massive virgin Mary; black stencils of Che Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos, an elderly couple walking by; a chubby hazel-coloured cartoon figure eating a dripping slice of pizza. Plus. Photo. Click. Next. New Post. Write a caption. Found this near Finsbury Park, what's the story? @tarafteh #MishandledArchive #art #photograph. Tag people > @tarafteh. Add Location > Blackstock Road. Share.

1 YZ: It is now evident that there has been a mistake in noting the day of the year in the hand-written labels of several pieces of the project including this one. The correct number in series for the piece Esavi has encountered is day 150/365.



Here Once Was

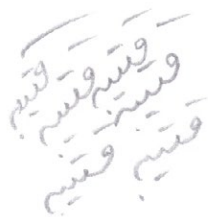
The Arsonist

711 CE, summer, Khwarazm

A new epidemic has taken over the region but no one talks about it. It seems to start as an unstoppable itch around the eyes that makes the skin inflamed, red and sore. I have seen many affected by this, adults and children. Their skin becomes so flaky it peels off and sheds in sheets as they pass. On some, there is no skin left around the eyes. They look as if they have tried to gouge their own eyes out but to no avail. The streets are covered in flakes of skin. I wonder what it is they are trying not to see.

Winter, 711-12CE, Khwarazm

Qutayba ibn Muslim, the Arab commander who is ploughing through the region with his army, will soon return to Khwarazm. I know he will. I hope that he listens to my advice as he doesn't seem to have much wisdom of his own other than how to swing a sword. Last week, I told him he will be forgotten unless he takes my advice – I was not lying. "Commander, you shall be remembered for purifying these lands of evil deeds". He nodded. "But for this gain you must eradicate all those who have knowledge of language





and history”. Qutayba nodded again. I was not sure he was following. “And in the silence that is to come, you will be remembered”. He nodded again. At that time my Arabic sounded a bit odd – maybe that was the problem. I took a long breath to start to elaborate on the silence I had referred to and on how he will be remembered in memories that erased a recall, memories that ‘in repeating and erasing, did not *represent* but rather *enacted* history’, memories that ‘*made* history by also erasing it.’¹ But just as I finished a long exhale, I was offered a strange-tasting, fatty milk and sent off.

QutaybamarchedintoKhwarazmtwodayso. Myneighbour – her flaky skin covered in pungent ointments – says she wishes her children were all deaf and blind and couldn’t see or hear the brutality. I wanted to tell her to look beyond the shock of the event and embrace how she can bear witness to this erasure and destruction – but I knew I would only sound like an irritating phoney. Instead, I offered her some fresh mint tea which she rejected.

The people of Khwarazm, my neighbour included, were not ready for this. Since Qutayba killed their learned men – and surely women, but I feel alone in attesting to

1 Caruth, ‘After the End,’ 34.

this – and ‘burned their books and writings, they became entirely illiterate (forgot writing and reading), and relied in every knowledge or science which they required solely upon memory. In the long course of time they forgot that of which there had been a divergence of opinion, and kept by memory that which had been generally agreed upon. But Allah knows best’, as they say these days.¹ It is fascinating how their experience of destruction is linked with new ways of remembering that only engage and retain the collective experience and repress divergent or individual memories. If my neighbour had survived we could have finally had a chat about this but unfortunately all I have on this matter now is this passage from a book by a Khwarizmian scholar:

Kutaiba ben Muslim had extinguished and ruined in every possible way those who knew how to write and read the Khwarizmi writing, who knew the history of the country and who studied their sciences. In consequence these things are involved in so much obscurity, that it is impossible to obtain an accurate knowledge of the history of the country since the time of Islam (not to speak of the pre-Muhammadan times).²

1 al-Biruni, *Chronology of Ancient Nations*, 58.

2 al-Biruni, *Chronology of Ancient Nations*, 58.

Arsonist Researchers Running Against the Clock

Researchers puzzled by the ever-burning material of the recently discovered memoir

Earlier this summer the discovery of a memoir written by a time-travelling arsonist created a global buzz in international news leading to the #GoArsonist challenge inciting people across the world to set fire to their books and libraries causing damage to public property in some cases.

Researchers have now confirmed that the notebook is fully or partly made with an ever-burning material that works like an eternal internal fire.

‘We don’t yet know what the substance is and whether it has contaminated all the pages or only some parts’, says Jo Martin of the Paris Conservation Trust. ‘Following the Global Conservation Protocol, our team always treated the notebook wearing special gloves that do not allow any cross-contamination between the hand and the object’. It appears that the use of these special

gloves resulted in researchers not noticing the constant internal heat of the notebook.

‘We noticed an oddity when our digitising devices reached maximum temperature in the vicinity of the notebook’.

It is estimated that an additional 32 pages have been incinerated since the discovery of the memoirs. And the number is expected to rise as scientists have not yet been able to identify an antidote.

Due to the impossibility of digitisation, a team of translators have gathered in Paris and are working from the original notebook.

‘We have a very strict rota for accessing the notebook’, says lead translator Sonia Makhmutova. ‘Our team consists of seventy-nine translators working in shifts twenty four hours a day to beat the fire’.

Will the memoir give them enough time or will it destroy itself?

Khialat Daily
Thursday 2 August 2018

The Arsonist suffers from a mania, a *mal*, in the Derridean sense. The title of Jacques Derrida's influential book *Mal d'archive* (translated as *Archive Fever* in English) is often discussed for its untranslatability. To be *en mal d'archive* can mean something else than to suffer from a sickness, from a trouble or from what the noun *mal* might mean. It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away.¹

In light of this untranslatability, Shoshana Felman writes:

Mal d'archive means, first of all, literally, the Evil of the Archive (or, the Evil stored within the Archive), but it (the French word *mal*) also signifies the pain of the archive, the suffering of the archive, the illness of the archive, the symptom of the archive; and it is all these meanings which are held together in the complexity and ambiguity of this title.²

The Arsonist's *mal* is a manic drive for burning and destruction. And a manic obsession with keeping a record of the fire in ashes, lists and tiny books. We read in the Arsonist's memoir that they are conducting a research through practice, that all these fires across centuries and countries are an experiment for them. A destructive archival project of sorts. But the memoirs, and the project, are incomplete, or at least so it seems to us – half-burnt with missing pages and sections. We won't know if this eternal destructive enquiry, this experimental research, ever led to a thesis. Perhaps it never did, or never wanted to, in which case either only the process of research became significant or it all became frustrating and had to be given to an eternal flame. But perhaps it did result in a thesis and the thesis itself had to be burnt

1 Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 57.

2 Felman, 'Fire in the Archive,' 48-49.

for the thesis to prove itself.

In between understanding *mal d'archive* as the illness caused to us by the archive, the passion within us towards the archive and the origin, and the illness, pain and suffering *stored in* the archive (and the origin), the Arsonist is burning archives to destroy the 'Evil stored within the Archive' and to satisfy and soothe their own desire and illness (fever, *mal*, fire, unrest) caused by the archive.

The Arsonist

Towards the end of the 8th century



I've lost track of days and months. The past two hundred years have been fascinating to observe and I haven't left the region other than on a few short trips. The Arab-Islamic military managed to put down all uprisings in the region. I had to perfect my Arabic to keep up with the new changes and the new language of the court. Many languages have been erased from writings and with them the tales, history, science and poetry. I never expected such great shifts.

I have nearly finished listing all the books and documents that have been put to fire, water or sword in the past two hundred years. It is a very long list and to be honest not all of them are rare treasures. I'm still thinking of the possibilities of a 'self-erasing history', of coupling 'self-archiving' and 'self-erasure'.¹ It is easier said than done.

It seems that from now on the Iranians will have to be dependent on their old enemies, the Greeks, to learn about their own history because there is close to no documents left from themselves and in their own language. It will be a joy to

1 Caruth, 'After the End,' 36.

observe how (if) they crawl out of this mire.¹ But of course, this is not the end of writing, of language, of history or at least so thought Goethe several centuries later (I am not sure about the authenticity of his sources):

The Arabic language that was immediately introduced prevented any re-establishment of what could be called national. But here too the culture of those who had been conquered eventually overcame the rudeness of the conquerors. Muslim victors relished the love of pomp, the pleasing customs, and the poetic fragments of the vanquished.²

2018 - it's very
(common that on
a bus or taxi
ride in Tehran
someone blames
the misery
and doomed
destiny of the
nation, the reinvention
of sanctions by the
US and the high
price of onions
and feminine
hygiene products
on the Arab
invasion of
650s. I find
this utterly
fascinating. There
is a certain
nostalgia for a
before 1979 revolution
and another for a
before the Arab
invasion era - a
presumed era
of freedom,
literature,
music and
glory - all
burnt in
their fires.
This centuries-
long nostalgia
is so fascinating
I want to
bash my brains
against the
wall

1 Khamneipour, *Zarathustra*, 167.

2 Goethe, *West-East Divan*, 193.



Say Cheese



Wang Shu

{~/Checkpoint 10.03.07}

{go// Tianjin-CGV-LD2 environment}

August 28, 2097

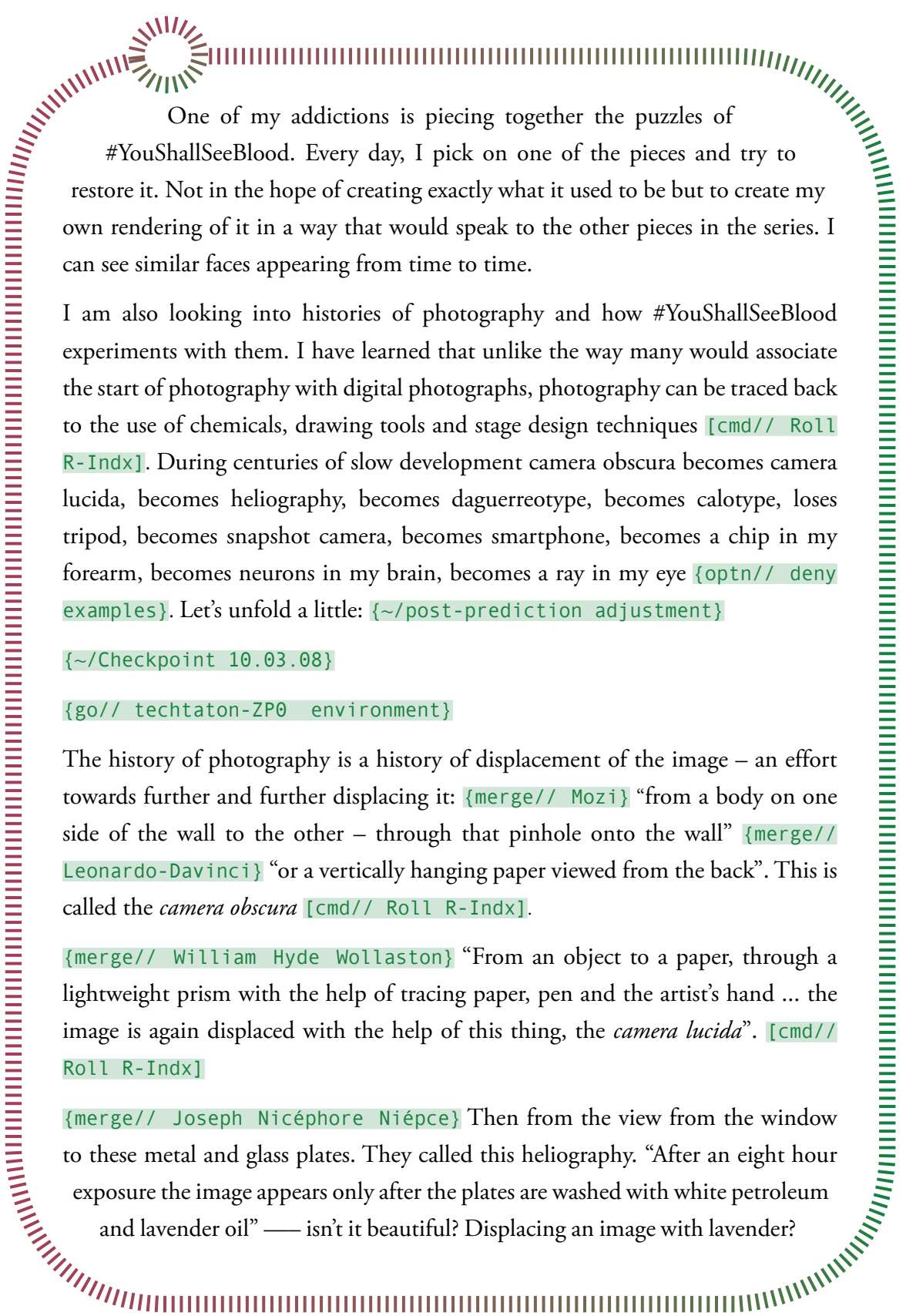
Chengdu-Tianjin CGV

39 °C, 96% humidity [cmd// L-Palm on skull]

On my way to work – for a rare face-to-face session. I clearly remember this ride, although, at that moment I felt my brain was going to melt in my skull. The aircoils are broken. The car is steamed up like a rice cooker. Everyone's on the edge. A woman's cane has stopped working because of the heat and she is nervously gasping for air while clinging to the hand rail and sending alarm nodes. A teen is punching the windows because their network has switched off. I think they should know that this is only natural in conditions of over 92% humidity but, you know, kids these days ... they only know how to consume. The gasping woman sends so many alarm nodes that they stop the CGV in the middle of nowhere to fix their cane. Just as we stop, I receive a message from my colleague Bonzo: "project's off – failed compliance – drink later?" Later, over a drink, I find out that our model Instagram remake did not pass the summit's decision threshold. We're off the schedule. {optn// install confusion 6.2 / disappointment3.1 / anger0.02 / loss8.5 / continue without emotion supply} [cmd// Punch Heart]

{go// #PhotographerInTheDust-KN9 environment}

Months have gone by since the failure of the Instagram remake and I keep jumping from one short-term project to another. It's a ridiculous phase of my life and you really don't need to know much about it – in fact, between the two of us, I've been told to leave this part out. What I can tell you is that I experienced some of the highest attention spans of my life.



One of my addictions is piecing together the puzzles of #YouShallSeeBlood. Every day, I pick on one of the pieces and try to restore it. Not in the hope of creating exactly what it used to be but to create my own rendering of it in a way that would speak to the other pieces in the series. I can see similar faces appearing from time to time.

I am also looking into histories of photography and how #YouShallSeeBlood experiments with them. I have learned that unlike the way many would associate the start of photography with digital photographs, photography can be traced back to the use of chemicals, drawing tools and stage design techniques [cmd// Roll R-Indx]. During centuries of slow development camera obscura becomes camera lucida, becomes heliography, becomes daguerreotype, becomes calotype, loses tripod, becomes snapshot camera, becomes smartphone, becomes a chip in my forearm, becomes neurons in my brain, becomes a ray in my eye {optn// deny examples}. Let's unfold a little: {~/post-prediction adjustment}

{~/Checkpoint 10.03.08}

{go// techtaton-ZP0 environment}

The history of photography is a history of displacement of the image – an effort towards further and further displacing it: {merge// Mozi} “from a body on one side of the wall to the other – through that pinhole onto the wall” {merge// Leonardo-Davinci} “or a vertically hanging paper viewed from the back”. This is called the *camera obscura* [cmd// Roll R-Indx].

{merge// William Hyde Wollaston} “From an object to a paper, through a lightweight prism with the help of tracing paper, pen and the artist's hand ... the image is again displaced with the help of this thing, the *camera lucida*”. [cmd// Roll R-Indx]

{merge// Joseph Nicéphore Niépce} Then from the view from the window to these metal and glass plates. They called this heliography. “After an eight hour exposure the image appears only after the plates are washed with white petroleum and lavender oil” — isn't it beautiful? Displacing an image with lavender?



[cmd// Roll R-Indx] {~/optimize confirmation
bias}

{merge// Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre} and then the image is displaced from “plaster casts of a ram and cupids, a wine basket and a nude engraving to silver plates – sensitised by iodine [cmd// Roll R-Indx], and developed by exposure to the vapour of mercury – fixing the image for the first time”. This is a daguerreotype. This one is the first one we know of, 1837 [cmd// Roll R-Indx].

{merge// William Henry Fox Talbot} “In 1844, the image of the abraded stone building of Queen’s College, Oxford, worn in time and weather [cmd// Roll R-Indx] is displaced onto a silver coated paper, processed and fixed with salt – no more sensitivity to light exposure”. For the first time, the chemically processed displaced image appears on paper. This process is called calotype – this image can travel where the human cannot and when the human cannot [cmd// Roll R-Indx] {optn// ref.1}. I’m sorry I kept on going, would you like a drink? [cmd// L-Palm forward]

{go// 1900s-boom-KN9 environment}

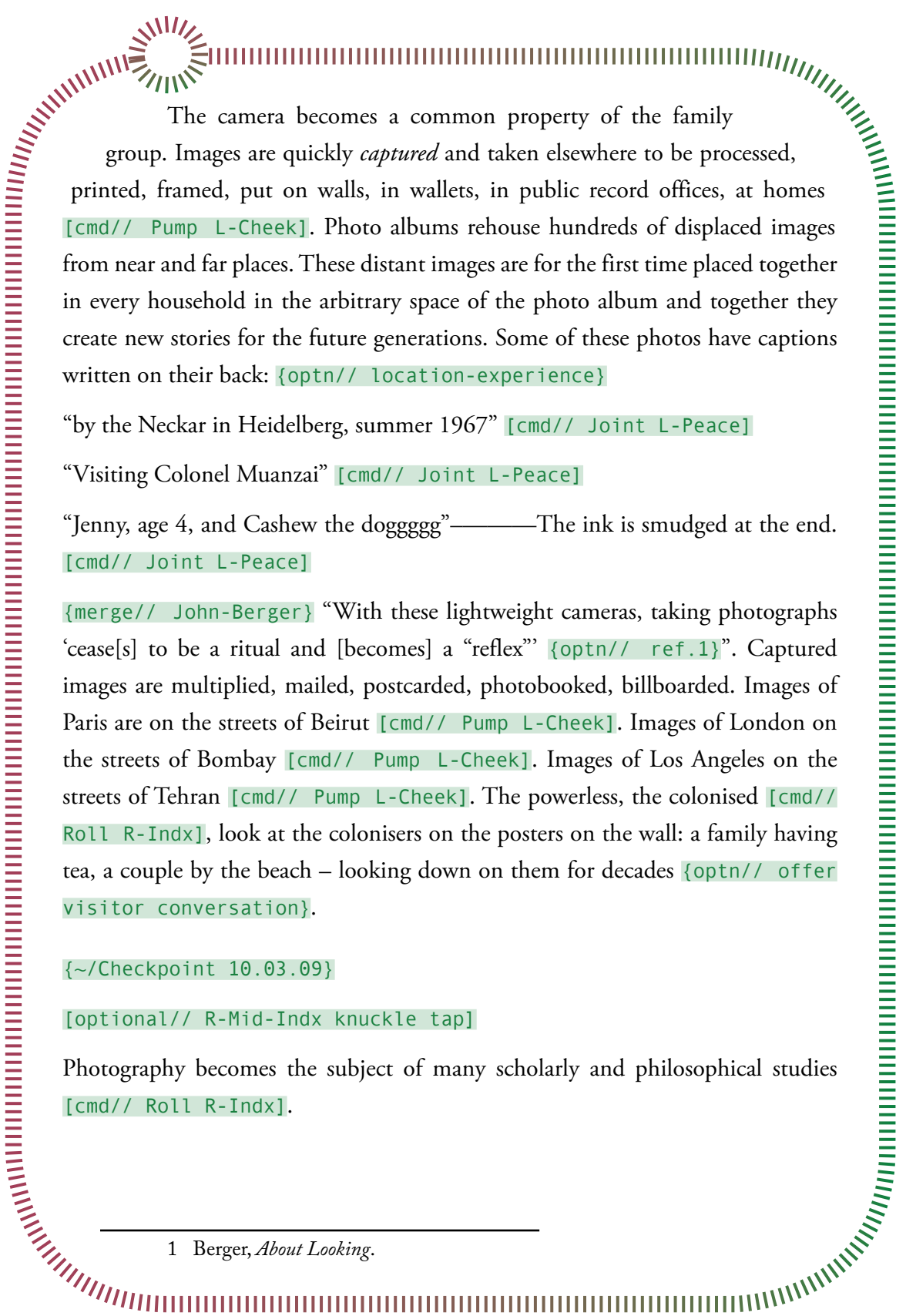
In 1888, the first Eastman Kodak camera enters the market. Their slogan is “You press the button, we do the rest”. This camera did not only attract amateur photographers but also many people who were keen to materialise their memories on paper but were not into learning the process of developing the film and printing photographs.

By around 1920s, photography becomes the most natural way of capturing special moments and recording events. {merge// Michael-Shanks/Connie-Svabo}

Photography offered image-making to the masses of industrial modernity, a popular and inexpensive alternative to fine arts portraiture – everyone could now have their portrait taken. {optn// ref.2}

1 Talbot, *Pencil of Nature*, 3-16.

2 Shanks and Svabo, ‘Archaeology and Photography,’ 2.



The camera becomes a common property of the family group. Images are quickly *captured* and taken elsewhere to be processed, printed, framed, put on walls, in wallets, in public record offices, at homes [cmd// Pump L-Cheek]. Photo albums rehouse hundreds of displaced images from near and far places. These distant images are for the first time placed together in every household in the arbitrary space of the photo album and together they create new stories for the future generations. Some of these photos have captions written on their back: {optn// location-experience}

“by the Neckar in Heidelberg, summer 1967” [cmd// Joint L-Peace]

“Visiting Colonel Muanzai” [cmd// Joint L-Peace]

“Jenny, age 4, and Cashew the doggggg”———The ink is smudged at the end. [cmd// Joint L-Peace]

{merge// John-Berger} “With these lightweight cameras, taking photographs ‘cease[s] to be a ritual and [becomes] a “reflex” {optn// ref.1}”. Captured images are multiplied, mailed, postcarded, photobooked, billboarded. Images of Paris are on the streets of Beirut [cmd// Pump L-Cheek]. Images of London on the streets of Bombay [cmd// Pump L-Cheek]. Images of Los Angeles on the streets of Tehran [cmd// Pump L-Cheek]. The powerless, the colonised [cmd// Roll R-Indx], look at the colonisers on the posters on the wall: a family having tea, a couple by the beach – looking down on them for decades {optn// offer visitor conversation}.

{~/Checkpoint 10.03.09}

[optional// R-Mid-Indx knuckle tap]

Photography becomes the subject of many scholarly and philosophical studies [cmd// Roll R-Indx].

1 Berger, *About Looking*.



{merge// Pierre-Bourdieu / Susan-Sontag /

John-Berger / Roland-Barthes}

{focus// Pierre-Bourdieu} This is French philosopher and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu {optn// allow visitor intro}. Bourdieu is interested in the ‘family functions’ of the camera. What the camera does for the family or better say what the family makes the camera do:

[The camera exists in the family mostly] by the function conferred upon it by the family group, namely that of solemnizing and immortalizing the high points of family life, in short, of reinforcing the integration of the family group by reasserting the sense that it has both of itself and of its unity. {optn// ref.1}

What Bourdieu means is that by documenting the good moments of family life such as weddings, birthdays, holidays or the playing of children, the family uses the camera to turn these good moments into good memories and therefore define itself through these images of happiness and togetherness as a social unit that causes happiness and unity.

{focus// Susan-Sontag} Susan Sontag calls this familial photography habit the ‘portrait-chronicle’ of the family {optn// ref.2}. “Just as the nuclear family was being separated from the larger family life at the expense of erasing the relatives from the family unit, a family’s photograph album becomes almost all that remains of the extended family {optn// ref.3}”. This was particularly true of the industrialising countries of Europe and America.

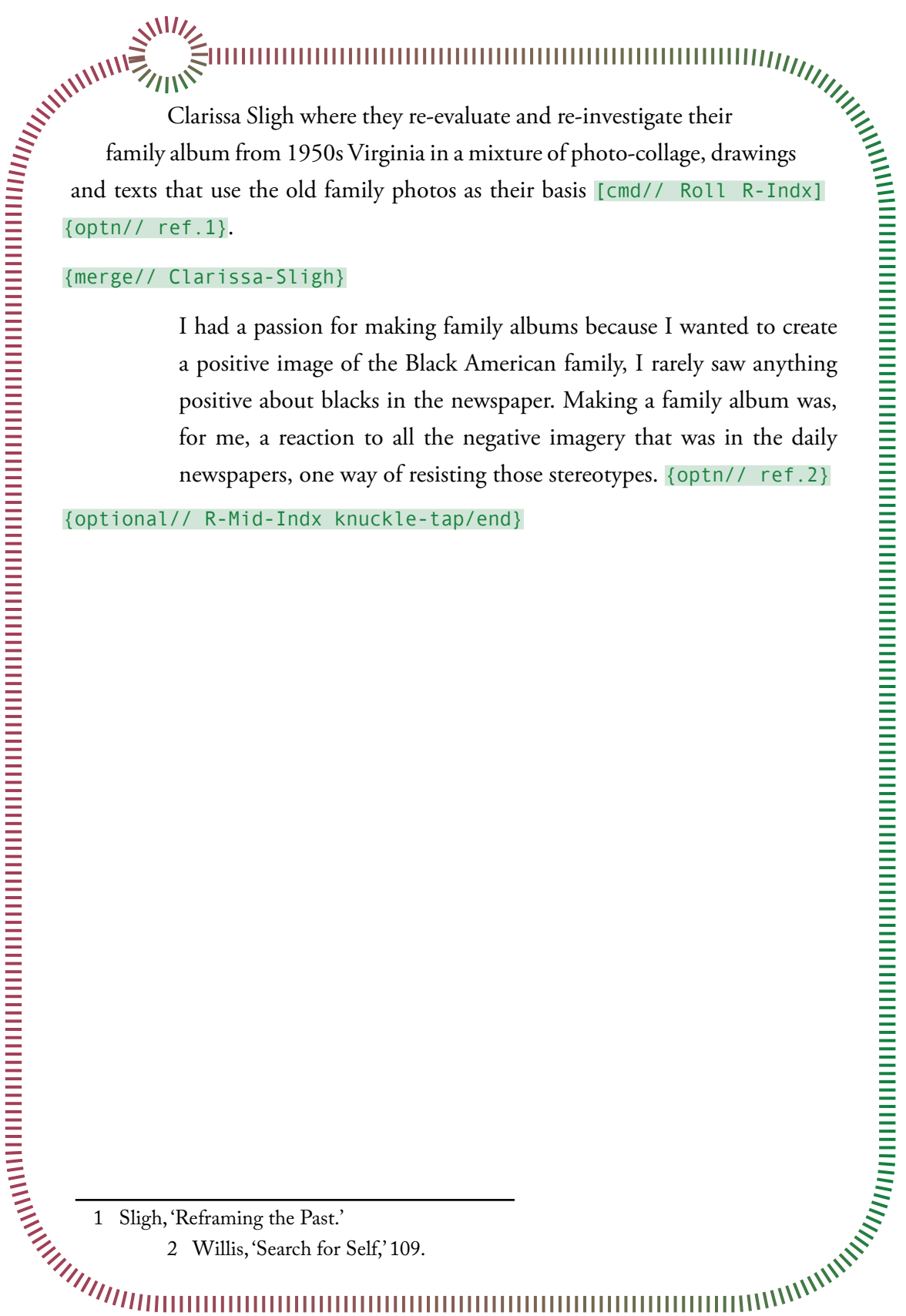
{focus// Clarissa-Sligh-Reframing-Past} The views of the nuclear white family that Bourdieu was obsessed with were soon used to challenge the social stereotyping of people based on their race, nation and social class.

This is *Reframing the Past (1984-1994)*, a series of works by American photographer

1 Bourdieu, *Photography*, 19.

2 Sontag, *On Photography*, 5.

3 Sontag, 6.



Clarissa Sligh where they re-evaluate and re-investigate their family album from 1950s Virginia in a mixture of photo-collage, drawings and texts that use the old family photos as their basis [cmd// Roll R-Indx] {optn// ref.1}.

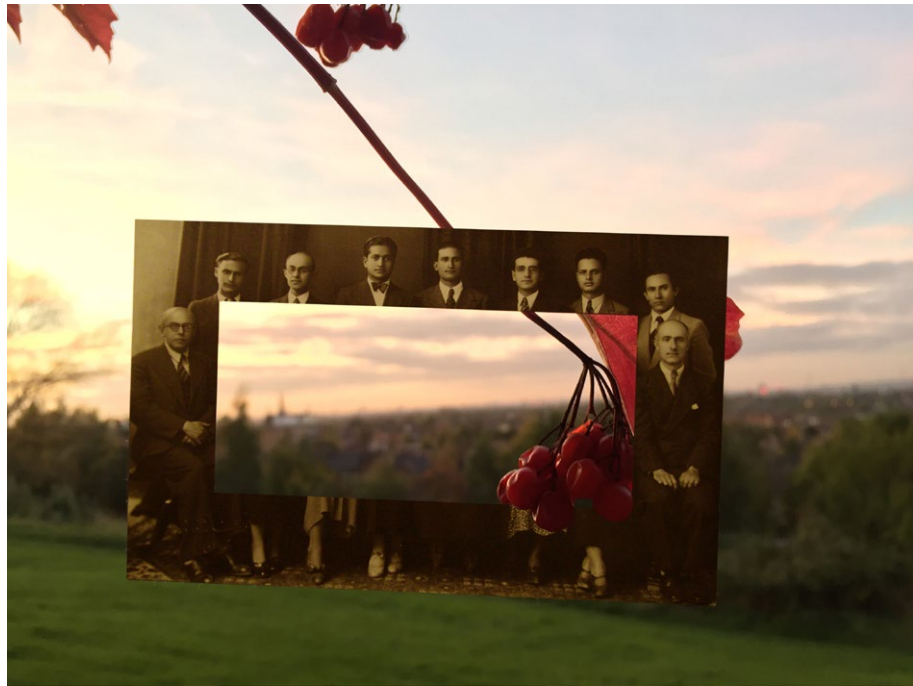
{merge// Clarissa-Sligh}

I had a passion for making family albums because I wanted to create a positive image of the Black American family, I rarely saw anything positive about blacks in the newspaper. Making a family album was, for me, a reaction to all the negative imagery that was in the daily newspapers, one way of resisting those stereotypes. {optn// ref.2}

{optional// R-Mid-Indx knuckle-tap/end}

1 Sligh, 'Reframing the Past.'

2 Willis, 'Search for Self,' 109.



Performing Destruction

The Arsonist is experimenting on imagining a history of the erasure of history and its traces. Experiments in the manipulation of a memory that is trying to erase itself. A repetitive act of erasure that keeps rising from the ashes in a new form after every fire, and departing from it towards a new future. Archives are destroyed, languages are lost. Through this destruction and loss, new encounters (good or evil) are made possible, stories are written. The Arsonist takes us to the very day of the fires, at that time, on that date; much like the archive fever that Derrida observes in Herbert Hanold that leads him to literally follow the traces of Gradiva.¹ Hanold's relationship to the traces of Gradiva (and archaeology) is of a kind where he wants to relive the exact singular step of Gradiva; the very pressure and the same impression that the steps must have left on the ash. The drive to re-live such events of fire, destruction and reappearance at the time of their happening is what makes me feel we must continue this journey with the Arsonist. We must follow their experiments regardless of their failure or success.

1 Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 61.

The Arsonist

Near the end of the millennium

Bukhara, Storehouse of Wisdom

Ibn Sina (Avicenna as some call him) only needed a gentle nudge. He was a very clever person; no wonder he had already memorised Farabi's book on metaphysics. Ibn Sina and I spoke for forty hours without a break. We talked about astronomy, archives, memory, medicine, history. About how the thinking of the archive is both a thinking of memory and of history. We talked about the possibility of a history made of events that erase and 'destroy their own remembrance' and about how memories of history are suppressed and repressed.¹ We talked about fire and its traces. Ibn Sina was super interested in my work. I'm sure he would have enjoyed a chat with Cathy as well.

Just as I was thinking that we are in such great harmony, he asked me, "Tell me, my friend, why are you against archives?". I was a bit surprised to hear that I come across as someone who is against archives. Maybe Ibn Sina is not as smart as he seems. "Me? Against archives?" I asked.

1 Caruth, 'After the End,' 32.



He raised his eyebrows.

“I am not against archives, my friend! I’m obsessed with them. And for the record, I’m not against preservation. Nor conservation. I’m not against books, parchments, manuscripts, bits of paper, wills, identity cards, documents, receipts, objects, houses, albums, photographs, notebooks, museum tickets, leaflets, newspaper clippings, maps, letters, bric-a-brac, films, tape recordings, catalogues, memoirs, transcripts, scripts, articles or chronicles. I don’t destroy archives because I’m against them. That is not the point. Archives will destroy themselves eventually. My goal is to question what we consider archivable and challenge who owns an archive and how we can break from the constraints of conventional ownership. I want to challenge how a dance for example – I know you like dance my friend – is considered to be different from all of these materials and *stuff*. And how the liveness of the dance equals ephemerality, equals *loss*. I want to look at things that are lost in archives, particularly imperial archives, and to bring the archive face to face with loss – possibly to discover that there is no such thing as loss but rather there is transformation. There is performance at the heart of every archive, there is liveness. And I approach this performance with another form of performance: the act of destruction, the performance of mishandling. We can’t

12/10/94

measure performativity with the length of a finger or two – it is already invisible – so the performance of destruction will not be able to destroy performativity with fire. Therefore what remains from the burn is the performance and the ashes – a transformation as I see it.”

Ibn Sina looked at me puzzled and eventually said: “tape recordings?” I remained silent as this could need a long explanation.

After a long pause, he said: “films?”

In reply to this, I asked: “So do you prefer to be called Ibn Sina or Abu Ali?”

I was glad I had not mentioned the 21st century corporate and GAFA archives in my impromptu lecture – that would have opened a whole other barrel of beetles.¹

Several hours later, Ibn Sina devised a brilliant plan. “I shall discover the cure to the illness of the Samanid king”, he said, “and in return request access to the royal library”.

Later he reported back to me:

I was admitted to a building which had many rooms; in each room there were chests of books piled one on top of the other. [...] I looked through

1 GAFA: Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple

the catalog of books by the ancients and asked for whichever one I needed. I saw books whose names had not reached very many people and which I had not seen before that time, nor have I seen since. I read these books and mastered what was useful in them and discovered the status of each man in his science.¹

Later, a local saleswoman told me, 'a fire [mysteriously] broke out in this library and the books were totally destroyed.'²

It was difficult to stop Abu Ali's opponents from spreading a rumour that he had

set fire to those books in order to appropriate these sciences and precious [knowledge] for himself and cut off the sources of these useful [sciences] from their adherents.³

But I knew better than that.

1 *The Life of Ibn Sina*, 37.

2 *The Life of Ibn Sina*, 123.

3 *The Life of Ibn Sina*, 123.

Here for the first and only time in the memoirs, the Arsonist uses the term *mishandling* about their approach to archives. No further context is given and it might be just a coincidence but nonetheless it is fascinating that they also see themselves as mishandling archives. They talk about the ‘act of destruction’ and the ‘performance of mishandling’. The Arsonist’s destructive drive is here revisited as a performative destructive drive; an act. The Arsonist performs this act repeatedly in different guises, under different masks and names and on different stages (archives, libraries).

Another act of performative destruction happens in *Mishandled Archive*. The artist performs destroying an archive by leaving items from it in unsafe places where they would eventually deteriorate. The often neglected fact that all the archival material that is dispersed (destroyed) through *Mishandled Archive* are copies of the original, allows for construing the artist’s destructive acts as performative ones – irrespective of these dispersals being accompanied by a more literal form of performance: the daily dances.

Fatehi Irani’s making process oscillates between gestures of conservation and destruction: digitising material archives – cropping – reprinting – dispersing – documenting – departing – online sharing – performing. *Mishandled Archive* repeats acts of preservation and conservation such as digitising, retaining copies and collecting dispersed material while it tries to abandon conventional modes of preservation. It therefore exists in a continuous tension between preservation and destruction. This destruction can be viewed as a performance because it is not destroying unreplacable physical material, but instead, destroys objects (props) that can later be made again and destroyed again and made again and destroyed again.



Micro-activism: The Long, Twisted But Not Vague History of Sha and Di

Anahid Ravanpoor

On Genealogies of the Two Women

According to Beyzaei, Shahrzād (شهرزاد) is a transformation of the Old Persian word *Khshathrazāt* [quite a mouthful]. The first part *Khshathra* (*Xšaθra*) (later *Shahr*) meant “country”, “territory” and “kingdom”. In contemporary Farsi *shahr* still means “city” and “town”. The second part *zād* or *zāt* means “born to” or “the child of”. In combination Shahrzād can be translated to “city born”, “native” or “indigenous [born in the territory]” which can also be related to being “civilized” and “cultured”.¹

Dīnāzād (دین‌آزاد) is made up of two words: *dīn* (meaning “wisdom”, “thought” and “perception” in Old Persian) and *āzād* (meaning “free”, “noble” or “born to” [as in “child of”]). So in combination Dīnāzād can be translated to either “freethinker”, “noble thinker”, or “the child of wisdom”.²

In the translations and retranslations into Arabic and then European languages Shahrzād has transformed into Shahrazad, Scheherazade, Sheherazade or Sherazade. The meaning and etymology of the name change with each *a* or *e* so Scheherazade has been mistakenly traced to a different root (*ChithraAzata* later *ChehrAzad*) and translated to “free-face” (perhaps again of Orientalist interest regarding the image of a medieval Muslim woman).³ These various transliterations may be the result of the difficulty in pronunciation of consecutive consonants for natives of some European languages. For example, for many people it is difficult to pronounce *Tehran* – either the *h* gets lost and it becomes *Teraan* or an *e* is added to help the pronunciation, turning it into *Teheran*.

Dīnāzād has also been mistranslated into Dunyazad, made up of

1 Beyzaei, *Hezar Afsan Kojast?*, 232-33

2 Beyzaei, 231-232.

3 Beyzaei, 105.

the words *dunya* or *donya* meaning “world” and *āzād* meaning “free” and therefore in combination meaning “world-freer”. Other variations again mistakenly have transformed her into Dīnār Zād, *dīnār* (“gold coin”), plus *zād* (“born to”), potentially meaning “wealthy” or “born to wealth”.¹

Beyzaei follows the footsteps of Shahrzād and Dīnāzād and discovers the processes that these two come from and those they enable. He traces the structure of the frame story of *A Thousand Tales* in several other instances of Iranian literature and myths. He sees Shahrzād and Dīnāzād as variations of other characters in Persian literature. In all of these instances, two women are captured or otherwise oppressed by a tyrant figure and rescued through an action usually involving some form of daily repetition. He suggests that Shahrnāz and Arnavāz, the two daughters of Jamshid the king of Iran captured by Zahhak and later freed by Fereydoun in a tenth century epic poem in the *Shahnameh* and their older variations as Sang-havak and Arenavak in the *Avesta* (the Zoroastrian holy book) are manifestations of the same characters as Shahrzād and Dīnāzād.² He also suggests that Hōmay and Behāfarid, the two daughters of the Iranian king Goshtāsp who were captured by the neighbouring Chionites and freed by their brother Esfandiar as written in the *Shahnameh* as well as their older manifestations in the *Avesta* as Hoomāg and Vārizkanā are also the same two women. Beyzaei observes that all of these pairs of women are the earthly renditions of two female deities of the agricultural myths in Iran: Espandārmaz (protector of the earth) and Anāhitā (protector of the waters), suggested to be the two daughters of Ahooramazdā, the God of Zoroastrianism. The two deities are themselves a transformation of an older Indo-Iranian divinity: Vāk, the goddess of speech, song, voice and tunes – who has obviously given her name to Sang-havak

1 For more on these translations, see Burton, *Thousand Nights and a Night*, 1:46; Ibn-an-Nadīm, *The Fihrist*, 713; and Beyzaei, 229-233.

2 *Shahnameh* [*Book of Kings*] is the tenth century masterpiece of Persian epic poetry by Abolqasem Ferdowsi.

and Arenavak. So as we say in Farsi این قصه سر دراز دارد.¹ In all of these stories and myths Beyzaei, identifies counterparts for all the main characters of the *Thousand Nights and One Night*: the two women, the king and the vizier.²

YZ

No matter what language you speak, by this point you are entitled to feel dizzy from the proliferation of names and naming in Ravanpoor's lecture. Might I suggest that you allow yourself to digest (or erase) some of this information by closing your eyes and counting from 1 to 36. Or perhaps by looking at the photographs of the following days in the accompanied card collection:

37, 67, 109, 163, 212, 294, 312, 328.

Anahid Ravanpoor

On Genealogies of the Two Women (*continued*)

We have all heard of Shahrzād, but her sister, Dīnāzād, is usually side-lined in studies of *The Thousand Nights and One Night*. This has led to difficulties in studying the genealogy of the story. At times sister, at times head of household or nursemaid, Dīnāzād is crucial in Shahrzād's plan but hardly ever studied. 'Note well what directions I entrust to thee!', Shahrzād says to Dīnāzād.

When I have gone in to the King I will send for thee
and when thou comest to me and seest that he hath
had his carnal will of me, do thou say to me: — O
my sister, and thou be not sleepy, relate to me some
new story, delectable and delightsome, the better to

1 [It's a long story]

2 For details on these variations, see Beyzaei, *Hezar Afsan Kojast?*, 127-189.

speed our waking hours; and I will tell thee a tale
which shall be our deliverance, if so Allah please,
and which shall turn the King from his blood-thirsty
custom.¹

Dīnāzād is the one who asks for Shahrzād's emancipatory words every evening. Without her no story can be told nor heard, no lives can be saved and no 'blood-thirsty custom' can be cured. For a thousand (and one) nights Shahrzād is telling her stories to the king through Dīnāzād. For a thousand (and one) nights Dīnāzād is listening – or pretending and performing to listen. Dīnāzād's (performed) lust for listening is contagious. She contaminates King Shahriar with this lust and joins Shahrzād in tricking him. She is both a listener and a participant; a participating audience without whom these stories would never be told.

Beyzaei emphasises the importance of the two women being *beside* each other in all their various variations in literature and history. The mythic equivalents of these women also confirm that they need to be side by side. Shahrzād, a personification of Espandārmaz (goddess of the earth and fertility), can only tell stories with the help of Dīnāzād, the personification of Anāhitā (the goddess of the waters and the supporter and facilitator of fertility). Simply put, earth does not bear fruit without water. Shahrzād (earth) and Dīnāzād (water) are together facing Shahriar who is the personification of Mithra (god of the sun). Shahriar (the sun) wants to fertilise Shahrzād (the earth) but without the presence of Dīnāzād (water) its heat is damaging for the earth and causes death and destruction. With her soothing nature (like that of water), Dīnāzād saves Shahrzād from the harm of the king (the heat of the sun) and helps fertilise all her latent potentials – as a storyteller, a mother and a saviour. The presence of Dīnāzād *beside* Shahrzād allows Shahrzād to talk, tell stories, sing, dance and entertain the king. The emancipation of the women of the city, therefore, only happens when these two women are beside

1 Burton, *Thousand Nights and a Night*, 1:57.

each other, not against or face to face. Just like the first signs of life which was formed as plants in places where the earth was next to water and like the first civilisations which were built at the meeting point of water and earth, these two women always need to be beside each other either as sisters, two wives, wife and maid, or mother and daughter.¹

YZ

What Ravanpoor forgets to mention here is that Beyzaei also traces the story of the two travelling sisters into an Iranian nurse rhyme *Davidam o Davidam* (I ran and I ran), also known as *Song of the Two Women*, sung by grandmothers for many generations up to now. A popular version of the song starts with:

“I ran and I ran — got to the top of a mountain — saw two women there — one of them gave me bread — one of them gave me water.”

The song goes on to describe how the bread and the water that the two women have given the narrator lead to the continuation of the circle of life: the narrator eats the bread and gives the water to the earth which in turn gives them grass which they feed to the goat and so on. Beyzaei believes that these two women are also the same as all the pairs of women Ravanpoor, after Beyzaei, has discussed so far – Shahrzād and Dīnāzād and all the other variations of the figure of the two women who have their roots in water and earth and help life continue by being beside each other.²

Now let's revisit the frame story of *Mishandled Archive* (see page 3 for the full story) – the story that was the

1 Beyzaei, *Hezar Afsan Kojast?*, 118-119.

2 Beyzaei, 377-394.

opening lines to several live iterations of the project – and see how the genealogies of these two women can relate to that story.

According to the frame story of Mishandled Archive, long before 2017 (when Mishandled Archive began), the artist was approached by two elderly women. The women were sisters who used their combined initials ShaDi. Although the word *shadi* in Farsi means “happiness”, the separate syllables possibly point to the beginnings of the names of Shahrzād and Dīnāzād. In the introduction to the project, the sisters are said to have phoned the artist and told her of their travels – magical things and people of all walks of life that they have encountered:

They told me how they have been roaming
in rivers and mountains, houses and streets,
collecting and telling stories every day for a
thousand nights.

It is not a coincidence that these two women have been telling and collecting stories for a “thousand nights”. Or that just like the two women of the song *Davidam o Davidam*, one of the sisters is always carrying bread and the other water. The link between the sisters of Mishandled Archive and *A Thousand Tales* and *The Thousand Nights and One Night* becomes more clear when we are told that the sisters roam in mountains and rivers, meaning they are connected to earth and water – same as the deities Espandārmaz and Anāhitā that Shahrzād and Dīnāzād personify.

There are therefore two connecting threads between Mishandled Archive and *A Thousand Tales*. One is the reincarnation of Shahrzād and Dīnāzād in the frame story of Mishandled Archive as ShaDi. The other is that Fatehi Irani herself is an artist following a Shahrzād style of making through daily storytelling via images

and dances. A question that rises in the face of the latter thread is that “If Fatehi Irani is the Shahrzād of Mishandled Archive, who is its Dīnāzād – the other woman without whom the storytelling would be dismantled?”

I suggest that one possible response to this question is that the other woman, the Dīnāzād, or one possible Dīnāzād, of Fatehi Irani is Anahid Ravanpoor herself. A woman through whom Fatehi Irani can talk to another audience. Through Anahid Ravanpoor, Mishandled Archive is shared with a new audience – those present at the Indirect Art Lecture Series or ones like me and you who encounter her lecture through its transcript. As a critic and historian, Anahid Ravanpoor is *beside* the artist in supporting her plot by further contextualising some of its themes. Although not an exact mirror of the character of Dīnāzād, Ravanpoor, like her, is in the shadow, seen and talked about much less than the artist (or Shahrzād). It may be just an uncanny coincidence but her name Anahid is a variation of Anāhitā, the name of the divinity of the waters personified in Dīnāzād.

Anahid Ravanpoor

On Alternative Modes of Resistance

What distinguishes Shahrzād and Dīnāzād from their equivalents in literature, history and myth is that they are the central characters of their story. Unlike the other epic, heroic or religious books that reduce the two women to marginal roles, *A Thousand Tales* is meaningless without the two women. It is the two women who are holding all the “thousand tales” together. Shahrzād and Dīnāzād are unique in how they save not only themselves but also the other women in the country and the king from his madness – all through an embodiment of stories of marginalised people.

YZ

Don't forget that in the frame story of Mishandled Archive the artist states that most of the people that the two sisters were talking about were 'nobodies' and therefore difficult to trace. 'The nobodies' are another variation of being marginalised, forgotten and left to their own devices (see page 3).

Anahid Ravanpoor

On Alternative Modes of Resistance (*continued*)

To elaborate on this, I want to return to what I mentioned earlier about Ibn-an-Nadīm categorising *A Thousand Tales* under 'evening stories'.¹

Beyzaei differentiates between two types of stories: 'day stories' and 'night stories'. The day stories, according to Beyzaei, are focused on heroism, battles, masculinity and religion. These stories often appear in epic poetry and religious scripture, the likes of the *Shahnameh* and the *Avesta* in Iranian literature. These day stories reflect the official perspectives of the time and are all written by, or attributed to, male authors such as Ferdowsi and Zarathustra. On the other hand, the night stories, whether told at night time or day time, are private, intimate, feminine, confidential, erotic and full of suspense. These stories, mostly told by women and at night (and I imagine mixed with gossip and daily news from the passages and alleyways) never make it into the official history books. *A Thousand Tales* belongs to this latter category.²

Where in the epic and religious texts, the women are awaiting

1 Ibn-an-Nadīm, *The Fihrist*, 712-13.

2 Beyzaei, *Hezar Afsan Kojast?*, 72-73.

a male hero to rescue them from incarceration or tyranny, Shahrzād plans their emancipation herself and realises her plan with the help of Dīnāzād. *A Thousand Tales* removes the male hero and liberation through fighting, bloodshed, muscles and violence and replaces these with two clever women who can liberate themselves and others through dialogue, diplomacy, patience and endurance. These tales are, as Fatima Mernissi writes, ‘a symbol of the triumph of reason over violence’.¹ They replace physical battles with diplomatic planning and devise a methodology of resistance through repetition and multiplicity of small acts. That is to say their strategy is micro-activism. By that, I mean activism that consists of several small-scale actions. This is exactly what Shahrzād does: she introduces a feminine mode of thinking rather than a masculine form of fighting into the stories. As Suzanne Gauch writes in *Liberating Shahrzād*:

Shahrzād is no political radical; the changes at which her storytelling aims are not violent. Rather, her stories *bit by bit* overcome what were once seemingly insurmountable boundaries and limitations to change.²

In other similar epic or religious manifestations of Shahrzād and Dīnāzād, the two women, their feelings, their life in prison and their thoughts play marginal roles and are hardly ever discussed. In these stories, the women still keep up with compulsive repetitive actions (such as chanting and mantras) but these actions do not lead to their freedom. In the case of Shahrnāz and Arnavāz (of the *Shahnameh*) the daily victims of tyranny are two young men and even the masterminds of the repetitive plot that leads to saving one man from death every night are two male chefs who cook for the tyrant king, Zahhak, every day.

Perhaps it’s time for a bit of storytelling:

1 Mernissi, *Scheherazade Goes West*, 51.

2 Gauch, *Liberating Shahrzād*, xviii; emphasis mine.

The Tale of Zakhak

Following the advice of the evil Ahriman, Zakhak kills his own father and sits on his throne. Ahriman appears to him disguised as a master chef and cooks lavish banquets for Zakhak day after day.

When Zakhak wants to reward Ahriman, he says: 'I ask for nothing but to kiss the king's shoulders'.

Zakhak permits him to do so. Ahriman kisses Zakhak's shoulders and immediately disappears. At this moment, from each point kissed by Ahriman, a black snake grows out of Zakhak's shoulders.

When all surgeons and chemists are helpless in removing the snakes, Ahriman reappears, this time disguised as a chemist who advises Zakhak that the only way to live with the snakes is to feed them the brain of two young men every night – only then the snakes shall calm down. Thus, Zakhak orders two men to be killed and fed to the snakes every night.

Zakhak attacks Iran when there is unrest under the rule of Jamshid. When he takes Jamshid's throne, he incarcerates his two daughters, Shahrnāz and Arnavāz.

Two chefs who work for Zakhak and prepare the food for the snakes plan to set free one of the young men destined to be fed to the snakes every night. They mix the brain of one man with that of a sheep and feed this to the snakes allowing one man to escape death every night.

People rebel against the tyranny of Zakhak. The rebellion is led by a blacksmith named Kaveh who has lost his two sons to Zakhak's snakes. Kaveh's rebellion is followed by the appearance of a hero named Fereydoon who comes to take the throne while Zakhak is away in battle.

Fereydoon rescues Shahrnāz and Arnavāz and takes the throne. Upon Zakhak's return there is a violent battle between the army of Fereydoon supported by the masses against the army of Zakhak. Fereydoon wins the battle and puts Zakhak in chains in a cave in Damavand mountain.

The two women, Shahrnāz and Arnavāz, can easily be removed from this plot and it hardly affects the story. But unlike the story of Zakhak, the two women of *A Thousand Tales* are endowed with agency. An agency with which they save themselves and others from death and drive the demon out of his animosity and mania with their art. Where in most epic tales, such as Zakhak, the hero kills, captures or tortures the demon, in *A Thousand Tales* physical weapons have turned into the art of speech. Where Fereydoon, the hero, ties the demonised Zakhak in a cave for eternity, Shahrzād talks Shahrīar into humanity and compassion.¹ Through ceaseless repeated micro-acts of care, wisdom and entertainment, she brings the psychopathic serial-killer king to a resolution and proves that change without damage is possible.

If we look at the history of Iranian literature, we notice that authors of the day stories always held authorisation, endorsements or even commissions from the king's court, the dominant religion or religious figures. Their stories were therefore allowed into the official archives where they were to some degree safe from harm. This authorisation and entry into the archive, of course, had its consequences. The contents of these books had to be in favour of the king, the clerics or whatever the dominant discourse of the time was. This meant that anti-establishment voices never made it into those stories and subsequently into the official archives. Any literature such as *A Thousand Tales* that did not follow the dominant discourse was excluded from the official archives, academia and hence from being systematically taught to future generations.²

This does not mean that no signs of resistance, protest and disagreement with the rulers exists in the day stories. Ferdowsi, for example, is clearly concerned about the state of his country and language at his own time but he frames the story as a history

1 YZ: This reminds me of PA Skantze's 'methodology of narrative care' (Skantze, *Itinerant Spectator*, 8).

2 Mohammad Rezaei Rad quoted in Tabnak. "Hezar Afsan Kojast?"-e Beyzaei Montasher Shod.' [Beyzaei's "Where is A Thousand Tales?" is Published], *Tabnak*, 19 May, 2012. <https://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/245820/>.

of the ancient times and heroes, thus, allowing his criticism of his contemporary dominant discourse to appear in the form of myths or fiction. And several other poets use metaphors, innuendo and *iham* (where a word can have two meanings both equally sound and intended) in order to create multi layered texts and poetry that can simultaneously have at least two meanings and in this way offering themselves an escape route in more precarious times.

The night stories, on the other hand, such as *A Thousand Tales*, were a platform where histories of the marginalised, working class, women, queers, cross-dressers, magicians, fortune-tellers and those of other beliefs could be told.¹ As Bayard Dodge suggests in a footnote to his translation of *The Fibrist*, these stories were ‘revealing an aspect of life not often dealt with in other books.’²

Not endorsed by the rulers and the clerics, these works were doomed to disappearance. These stories of the *passages*, became a passage for the histories of the peripheries that themselves only survived in passing – from body to body and from book to book, gradually compromising their nature in exchange for survival.

The day/night categorisation of stories also points out that in the night stories, the essence of storytelling is the most important element. Stories are told for the sake of being engaging, wondrous and emancipatory and because they have a particular story to tell, not because they want to preach a certain ideology or offer moral advice in praise of the king or religion. Stories are told because stories need to be told and retold and retold. In some translations of *The Thousand Nights and One Night* at the end of the hundred and forty-eighth night Shahriar says:

1 For more on queerness in *The Thousand Nights and One Night*, see Ghanim, *The Sexual World of the Arabian Nights*.

2 Ibn-an-Nadim, *The Fibrist*, 713.

O Shahrazad, thou wouldst cause me to renounce
my kingdom and thou makest me repent of having
slain so many women and maidens. Hast thou any
bird-stories?¹

So only a hundred and forty-eight nights into the story, the king decides that he shall not kill any more women. If Shahrzād was only telling stories to stop the mad king she should have stopped that night but she continues night after night because it is the storytelling that is important.

Earlier, I mentioned that Shahrzād's name can be translated to "native" or "indigenous". I want to use this translation as a segue into some of the concepts around resistance, 'indigenous resistance' to be specific, articulated by Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. In *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, Simpson discusses *Biskaabiiyang*, a word in Nishnaabemowin which means 'to look back' or 'returning to ourselves'. Used by Anishinabek researchers as a process of understanding how colonialism has impacted them, the word has the same usage as that of *decolonisation* which in Simpson's words is 'to pick up the things we were forced to leave behind, whether they are songs, dances, values, or philosophies, and bring them into existence in the future'. So *Biskaabiiyang*, Simpson writes, does not mean a literal return to the past but rather re-creating the thriving culture of the past 'to support the well-being of our contemporary citizens.'²

But why borrow a word from thousands of miles away to look at Shahrzād? Particularly from Simpson who insists on concepts needing local meaning in order for them to have local resonance?³ In following the etymology of the names of the characters of *A Thousand Tales*, Beyzaei suggests that Shahriar's name can be a reiteration of *Shahr-tazh* meaning "the person who attacks the

1 Burton, *Thousand Nights and a Night*, 3:66.

2 Simpson, *Dancing*, chap. Gdi-nweninaa.

3 Simpson, chap. Gdi-nweninaa.

territory”. Through his close ties, which we already discussed, to Zahhak, the foreign ruler who attacked and took control of Iran, Shahriar can be seen as a coloniser who captivates the indigenous Shahrzād and brutalises the indigenous bodies of the native women [including but not limited to Shahrzād].¹

Ferdowsi describes the reign of Zahhak in Iran as such:

چو ضحاک شد بر جهان شهیار	برو سالیان انجمن شد خزار
نهان گشت کردار فرزانهان	پراکنده شد کام دیوانگان
هنر خوار شد جادویی ارجمند	نهان راستی آشکارا گزند
شده بر بدی دست دیوان دراز	به یکی زرقی سخن جز به راز ²

When Zahhak started ruling the world
His reign continued for thousand years forth
The deeds of the wise were henceforth concealed
The wishes of madmen spread all across
Art was diminished, sorcery praised
Truth was hidden and malice surfaced
Demons laid claim to all wickedness
Virtue was only spoke' in secret

The translation is my own and I am sure there is room for improvement but my hope is for us to see Zahhak's process of colonising the land and the people he overtakes. He continues to silence the wise and diminish the arts as mentioned in these passages with the killing of two people every night and removing their brains to be fed to his snakes.³ Isn't this thirst for people's brains a thirst for killing all forms of remembering the past? To

1 Beyzaei, *Hezar Afsan Kojast?*, 173-177.

2 Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh*, 1:45.

3 The word هنر [*honar*] translated to “art” can also be translated to “virtue”.

kill the men and capture and silence the women in fear for their lives?

When Shahriar, an iteration of Zahhak the coloniser, incarcerates Shahrzād, her method of resistance is to draw on elements of the past and traditions of storytelling in order to ‘support the well-being of [her] contemporary citizens’.¹ The indigenous resistance, as Simpson talks about it, is the resistance to becoming colonised. A resistance which starts with *Biskaabiiyang* – a concept very useful at the rise of questions of identity and colonialism. Simpson explains that *Biskaabiiyang* is not resistance alone but is a form of fluid drawing on the past that she translates to a ‘new emergence’.² According to Simpson, *Biskaabiiyang* is

reclaiming the fluidity around our traditions, not the rigidity of colonialism; [...] it means re-creating an artistic and intellectual renaissance within a larger political and cultural resurgence.³

Through demonstrating *Aanjigone*, another Nishnaabeg concept, and via the learnings from her elders, Simpson suggests a criticism which values an indirect approach rather than a constant interrogation of negativities. This approach highlights the importance of stories in indigenous resistance. It invites investing in a change that comes not from a place of anger and with an attack on the other but from a production and reanimation of positive knowledge and using tools such as metaphors, fragmentation and fluidity of identities.⁴

Although there is a great geographical distance between the indigenous identity of Shahrzād and the one that Simpson studies, their methods of resistance have much in common. Shahrzād is also investing in a change that replaces attacking the enemy with elaborating on her own way of seeing life. Rather than telling

1 Simpson, *Dancing*, chap. Gdi-nweninaa.

2 Simpson, chap. Gdi-nweninaa.

3 Simpson, chap. Gdi-nweninaa.

4 Simpson, chap. Gdi-nweninaa.

the king that he is wrong to kill women, she offers him another way of seeing the world – a fluid stream of stories, metaphors, dances and songs which similar to *Biskaabiiyang* draw on the past – through which the king (i.e. the attacker on the territory/ the coloniser) turns from his views. The notions of *Biskaabiiyang* and *Aanjigone* thus come to life in a wholly different context from their place of origin.



Silent Massacre and the Seductive Dwarf



The Arsonist

1027 CE, Rey

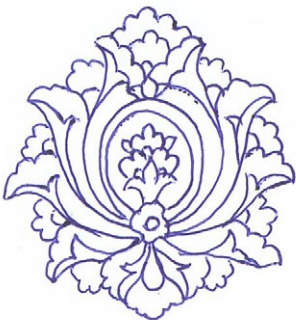
Even I am going mad and I am supposedly the best friend and confidant of Mahmud [of Ghazni]. In this year alone, he has killed thousands of people in Hamedan, Isfahan and now Ray. He accuses everyone of being Qaramti – that's the kind of Shias who have mixed Islam with Zoroastrianism. He kills them all unless the people are wealthy enough to settle the deal with him with money rather than their heads. He also has an obsession with attacking India and taking their wealth. He goes there EVERY WINTER.¹

“Isn't it amazing?”, Mahmud once said to me – leaning on his favourite peacock feather cushion – “No one talks about me in words other than praise” – I've had my eyes on that cushion for years. Then he recounted this poem by Farrokhi Sistani, one of the several poets who served at his court:

آن سال خوش نخند و از عمر بشمر
کز جمع کافران کند صد هزار کم²

1 Fooladvand, 'Bidad-e Mahmood.'

2 Farrokhi Sistani, *Divan-e Qasa'ed*, 436.





*He [Mahmud] does not sleep well and will not count a year
In which he does not erase thousands infidels from earth*

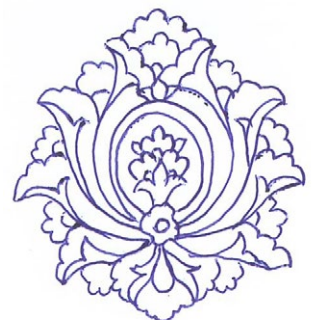
I find it more disturbing than amazing that Mahmud is using Persian literature to fuel his propaganda machine. Farrokhi and some of these other poets who praise him either have a great sense of humour or a very low ethics threshold.

Back to work. I return and repeat, return and repeat. I make memory and erase, make memory and erase, return, repeat, make, erase, repeat, erase, return, erase, make, repeat, return, erase. Now, at the time of writing, I am pushing myself to remember the events of last month in northern Iran, in Deylam. I know I was at the centre of it but I can't remember how I got there. The anonymous chronicler of the *The Collection of Histories and Tales* (1126) will write in detail about these events one hundred years from now but I want to remember with my own memory – one which I seem to have erased, at least partly.

The anonymous chronicler will write that I 'ordered many gallows to be erected and the nobles of Deylam were hung from the trees.'¹ Violence was escalating by the minute. People were dragged by their hair or robes. All this happened

1 Bahar, *Mojmal al-Tawarikh*, 404; my translation.

به جای آن که تو کردی بر ایشان درخت، شتاک
حدیث رسم دستان یکی بود از هزار امسان



in an eerie silence. No words, no screams, no banging doors, no screeching horses, no commanding officers. As if someone had muted all people, animals, objects and surfaces—————All events were unfolding like a silent automaton with a destructive drive that operates in silence and does not leave any trace of itself.

Fifteen tons of journals by philosophers and Shias were 'forced out of their houses, and ordered to be burnt by the foot of the trees of those hung.'¹ Robes were flapping in the silent wind and unintentionally revealing helpless arms, chests and legs. Smell of burning fabric, leather, toes, paper, ink, wood, stone. I have no memory of how it all started. If I was, am, standing there watching this silent saga, smelling burnt paper and fish oil, I must have played a part in it. I remember myself breaking open chests and cabinets and removing manuscripts and books. I remember piling these by the trees. But 'the story is long and I cannot say more of that in here.'²

The reason Rey had been safe from Mahmud's onslaught up to this point was thanks to Sayyida Shirin, a woman who

1 Bahar, 404; my translation.

2 Bahar, 404; my translation.

عنه
١٠٨

ruled over the region for thirty-nine years. Bless her, a clever woman. Mahmud once sent me as his messenger to Sayyida to command her to swear allegiance and pay Mahmud taxes or else he will attack and destroy Rey. Sayyida said to me:

Tell your Sultan I thought he was a wise king,
Wise enough to know that a king of his kind
should not to go to war with a woman; for lions
are both male and female. But if he does come
this way, I swear to God, I will not run away and
shall stand in battle.¹

Then she sat down, took a puff from her pipe and continued.

“There are only two possible results: I will either be victorious or defeated. If victory is mine, I will shatter Mahmud to pieces. I will write to the whole world that I have defeated Sultan Mahmud who has defeated hundreds of kings. I will celebrate with pride and people will write me praises and victory poems. Mahmud’s name will go down in history as the one who was destroyed by a woman and there is nothing worse than that for his kind. But if he conquers me, what will people say? That he has defeated a woman? Where is the pride in that? No one will write of his victory or praise his name for he has only defeated a woman.”²

1 Onsor-ol Ma’ali, *Ghabus Nameh*, 124; my translation.

2 A further elaborated variation of this conversation appears in

Read an article in a monthly magazine about Sultan Mahmud.

They still write about him in books and journals!!!

This writer suggests the current day reincarnation of Mahmud is the American President

George W. Bush who has invaded Iraq (not Rey) and is killing innocent people – not for infidelity but with a promise of freeing them from the madness of Saddam (Fooladvarand, 'Bidache Mahmud')

2004

Personally, I quite liked the message. I found it cunning and pungent; fighting Mahmud with his own dogmatism. I delivered it to Mahmud word for word. He never admitted that Sayyida was right but rather casually decided not to attack Rey.

But now Sayyida is dead and taking Rey is as easy as drinking water.

Meanwhile—at the library, Rey

While Mahmud was busy ordering the demise of the whole city, I strolled in the library. I removed all books and manuscripts from boxes and shelves. I read them – all of them – one by one. It would take a normal person five years, hundred and thirteen days and five hours to read them all. For me, it's obviously different. I discovered a book smaller than the length of my smallest finger. Two tiny handwritten volumes. I was surprised by the unusual heft of the books – each weighing like a large brick of wet clay. *Volume I* was a poem about two women who offered water and bread to travellers stranded in the mountain every day. At first it was hard to see the connection from one page to the next but I figured each page was the story of an encounter they

Onsor-ol Ma'ali, *Ghabus nameh*, 124; my translation.

من افسونهای اورا نشی دارم
 هزار قصه از برش دارم
 به طعنه‌ی علی در پیش دارم
 چنین قصه‌ها را نمی‌خوانم

had in the mountains: “The day we met the grazing horse”, “The day we met the boy with an elephant tattoo”, “The day we met the seductive dwarf”, “The day we met the upside down woman”, “The day we met the thirsty camelthorn”. And it went on for another three hundred and sixty stories. All in the tiniest script. *Volume II* was a text about how the two women prepared the bread; a baking manuscript that poetically spoke of kneading dough and the connection between the hands of the baker, the movement of kneading and the lumps of dough coming together to feed travellers.

For many years I have been interested in thinking of history as a mass of dough continuously folded onto itself by the writer/kneader? What would it mean for the (history)writer to be a kneader? And to write history and weave time in a new direction with every fold? I’m interested in the traces that the writer (kneader) leaves on the mass of history. And also in how time is marked in the layering of the dough with the continuous repetitive act of kneading that creates a new mass with every fold.¹

Aaaa, one more thing about the tiny books: the page numbers on both volumes were strange. They were all seven digit numbers, as if these were sections of a much longer series.

1 Serres, *Rome*, 68-70.

The strange page numbers brought to mind Borges's *Book of Sand*, the infinite book with infinite page numbers where no page is the first page and it cannot be put to fire because it might 'suffocate the planet with smoke':

I thought of fire, but I feared that the burning of an infinite book might likewise prove infinite and suffocate the planet with smoke.¹

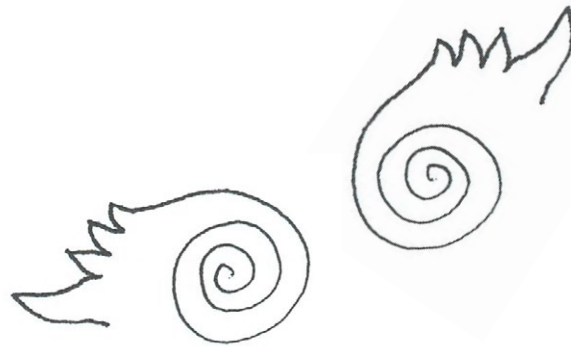
The books were clearly passed down from hand to hand. There were traces of water splashing and lumps of what used to be wet flour but now worked like a cement that pressed the pages together making it impossible to turn the page. I pushed the two volumes in my undersleeve and continued starting a fire.

I made sure the flames had the might to engulf the whole place. Then I sat behind this desk, where I am still sitting, and studied a recent map I found in one of the drawers. I was looking for my old home near Tanshee lake, northwest of the Caspian sea, and written in its place I saw, in hardly legible calligraphy, *Desert of Tanshee*. This should not have been shocking news for me; I'm older than that.

Three hours later. I am still inside the library. I've decided to write these words in ash while still sitting in the fire. It is hot

1 Borges, *Book of Sand*, 122.

and pleasurable. I am still impressed by the grandeur of the library even in its half-charred look. Beyhaghi, the historian, visited the library a while after I left and was apparently very impressed with the place and with my work, or perhaps regardless of my work.¹



1 Yaghut, *Mu'jam al-Udabā*, 16:259; quoted in Saati, *al-Waqf*, 40.

At the library of Rey, the Arsonist reads all the items in the archive or library from cover to cover translating them from an object on the shelf into a notion in the mind or a sensation in the body. The previous entry in their memoirs specifically records a moment when material archive turns to oral, living and embodied archive, half-forgotten, half-repeated. Here, embodiment becomes the tool for preservation – a kind of preservation that brings both the liveness of the body and its mortality into play. The Arsonist is experimenting with moments of transmission, translation and change and ultimately loss as pointed out by Pustianaz and repeatedly marked as unavoidable by Derrida. But it seems to me that this translation is more an alternative mode of survival rather than a disastrous loss.

In this entry of the memoirs, for the first time, the Arsonist physically saves a book from fire. This is a book in two volumes which is magically small for the content it is said to have. The first volume is a poem on two women who give water and bread to travellers. This reminds us of Shahrzād and Dīnāzād and their counterparts already discussed by Anahid Ravanpoor and previously named by the Arsonist (Sang-havak and Arenavak and others) – the same women who are the source of Mishandled Archive stories. The first volume of the tiny books might have been a variation of *Davidam o Davidam* (I ran and I ran), the children's rhyme in which the narrator meets two women in the mountain who give them bread and water. This variation of the rhyme, in the tiny books, is written from the point of view of the women, not the travelling passer-by. Perhaps the book is one of the last copies of the disappeared *A Thousand Tales* which in the Arsonist's narrative, in contradiction to the history we have heard elsewhere, is saved – while the rest of the library is left to burn. The book that had many enemies in the patriarchal, religious, hero-loving history is now

hidden in the undersleeve of the Arsonist on its way to new transformations.

The second volume is a baking book. This volume again connects the earth and water through the act of baking, reminding us of Anāhitā and Espandārmaz – deities of the waters and the earth. Through this second volume, the Arsonist raises an analogy between history, time and the mass of dough. This is not discussed in depth by the Arsonist and yet it sheds light on to their process and experiments. Perhaps we can unpack this analogy through the writings of the French philosopher Michel Serres.

Many centuries after these memoirs were written, Serres writes of the layering of time in history as if it is a mass of dough that the baker is constantly kneading, stretching, spreading and folding onto itself. In this analogy, points of time are not arranged along a linear temporal continuum but rather distant points of time are brought into proximity with each other creating new encounters and possibilities in history and time, a multi-trajectory pathway which goes beyond geometrical straight lines.

Kneading, which perhaps is worth pointing out that Serres sees as a woman's art, brings together the remotest points of the dough. The same mass is preserved but it is different at every fold. 'Each fold', Serres writes, 'every braid, each folding over changes the starting set into a more complex set'.¹ As the woman kneads history and time, new connections are made, new points of touch are momentarily formed and then separated to be folded into other points. In every fold, time and memory are layered on other times and memories without any visible trace. The Arsonist, as well as the two women – who make bread, tell stories, travel, perform – are kneading time and history in the same way as Serres describes with the stories they tell and the memoirs they write, unbound by linear time. They connect the most distant points of history to each other.

1 Serres, *Rome*, 68

As with the act of kneading, the memoirs of the Arsonist are repetitive. The same action happens again and again throughout history in different guises. The memoirs fold different points of time onto each other and in contact with the skin of the kneader (the writer) whose touch changes the existing mass of history. Anyone who has baked bread would know, or have heard, that the touch of the baker's skin on the dough affects the dough. The bacteria from their skin interacts with the wild yeast in the dough resulting in a different dough unique to the person who kneads it. Thus, in this bacterial connection, a unique history is written by each historian who has individually contaminated the dough [of history] with their bacteria [opinions, reflections, inventions]. The Arsonist, Shahrzād, Dīnāzād, Wang Shu, Anahid Ravanpoor, Tara Fatehi Irani and even myself will each contaminate the history we write with our own bacteria and maladies, not least of which is our *mal d'archive*.



The Omnipresent



Wang Shu

{~/Checkpoint 10.03.10}

{go// #ToCallLiftHandset-BZ6 environment}


Digital cameras made it all faster. Zero added cost for capturing more and more images. Point, shoot, delete. Point, shoot, delete. Point, shoot. Point, shoot. Point, shoot. Delete. Delete. Shoot. Shoot. Shoot. Shoot. Images could travel digitally via email and websites or be carried around on floppy disks, CDs, USB drives [cmd// Roll R-Idx]. No need for silver, salt, chloride, asphalt, iodine, pencil, mercury, paper, acetate or lavender oil. The photographer is freed from dependencies on film suppliers, chemicals and space for processing and developing the image [cmd// Roll R-Idx]. All of these activities which were once part of daily life for anyone with a camera were replaced by one press of a finger to shoot an image and another to delete it {optn// ref.17}.

Hi Zee. Zee, this is {visitor name}. Zee is our C&V tester. {optn// offer visitor conversation} Looks like you could do with a portion of {recommended visitor fruit/veg supplement} [cmd// R-palm forward].

{~/recalibrate collaborative filtering}

OK, shall we continue? {optn// offer visitor conversation} In the early 21st century, the camera phone was a new magic box. It was different from older cameras and phones in that it was none of them alone. Early 21st century scholars, Marsha Berry and Dean Keep, describe these devices: {merge// Marsha-Berry/Dean-Keep}

Mobile phones with cameras (camera-phones) are intimate personal devices that are ideal for capturing the ephemeral sights and sounds of our everyday experiences. We use them to communicate with others, to find our way through city streets and to micro-manage our lives. Their use has become second nature and they are an integral part



of a postmodern habitus. {optn// ref.1}

The merging of the phone and the camera resulted in almost everyone having their own personal camera. These camera phones and in particular smartphones displace images even further. Thousands of photos, videos and sounds are stored on the same device. Images are captured at any moment and, for the first time ever, multiplied and shared with many other people, places and times from the same device. Faster than ever, portraiture to the maximum, added filters and retouches.

And then comes the blooming of live streaming apps. For the first time in history, you don't need to be physically present at a concert, instead you can see it live streamed from thousands of sources present at the event [cmd// Pump L-Cheek]. The events are everywhere, in the air, and all that can stop you is how much you can invest in the latest technology and what access and quality of connection your local government and tech companies offer [cmd// Roll R-Indx]. Not all channels of communication are available in all places and to all people. Not all devices are affordable to all either [cmd// Roll R-Indx]. {~/post-prediction adjustment}

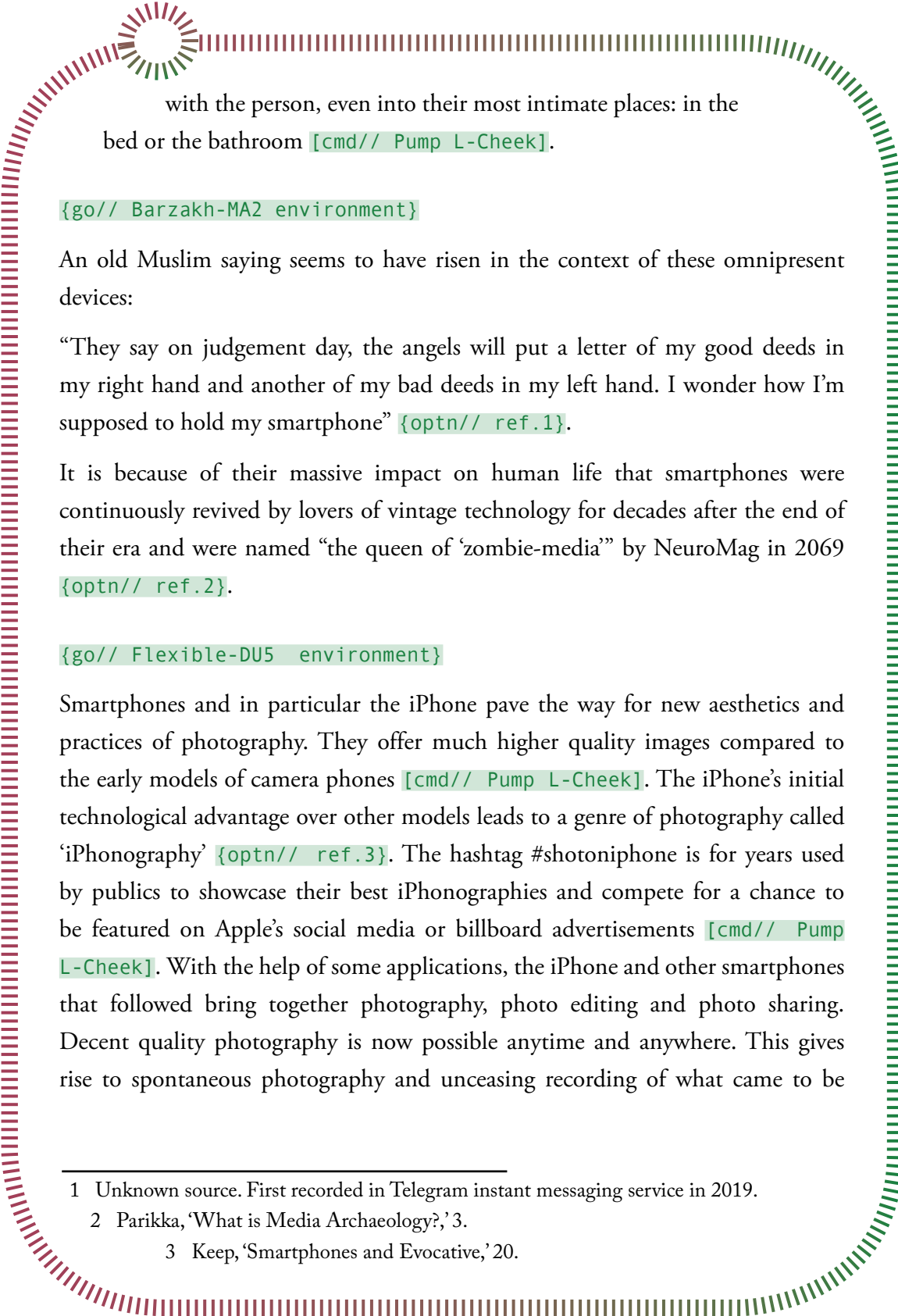
{~/Checkpoint 10.03.11}

{go// Flexible-DU5 environment}

Like a pocket-sized cabinet of wonders, smartphones captivate their users with several bits and pieces of wondrous media, apps and connections. People spend hours every day shooting and browsing through photographs and videos, and socialising via their camera-phones [cmd// Pump L-Cheek]. This is indeed different from the interbody communication system we have been born into. With their many wonders and entertainment and personal assistance functionalities, smartphones soon become inseparable from the body: invasive and omnipresent {optn// ref.2}. They become the first device that are literally taken everywhere

1 Dean and Berry, 'Remediating Vertov,' 165.

2 Shanks and Svabo, 'Mobile Media Photography,' 1-2.



with the person, even into their most intimate places: in the bed or the bathroom [cmd// Pump L-Cheek].

{go// Barzakh-MA2 environment}

An old Muslim saying seems to have risen in the context of these omnipresent devices:

“They say on judgement day, the angels will put a letter of my good deeds in my right hand and another of my bad deeds in my left hand. I wonder how I’m supposed to hold my smartphone” {optn// ref.1}.

It is because of their massive impact on human life that smartphones were continuously revived by lovers of vintage technology for decades after the end of their era and were named “the queen of ‘zombie-media’” by NeuroMag in 2069 {optn// ref.2}.

{go// Flexible-DU5 environment}

Smartphones and in particular the iPhone pave the way for new aesthetics and practices of photography. They offer much higher quality images compared to the early models of camera phones [cmd// Pump L-Cheek]. The iPhone’s initial technological advantage over other models leads to a genre of photography called ‘iPhonography’ {optn// ref.3}. The hashtag #shotoniphone is for years used by publics to showcase their best iPhonographies and compete for a chance to be featured on Apple’s social media or billboard advertisements [cmd// Pump L-Cheek]. With the help of some applications, the iPhone and other smartphones that followed bring together photography, photo editing and photo sharing. Decent quality photography is now possible anytime and anywhere. This gives rise to spontaneous photography and unceasing recording of what came to be

1 Unknown source. First recorded in Telegram instant messaging service in 2019.

2 Parikka, ‘What is Media Archaeology?’, 3.

3 Keep, ‘Smartphones and Evocative,’ 20.



considered *interesting* everyday sites, events and things

{optn// ref.1} [cmd// Pump L-Cheek]. This ceaseless capturing and constant archiving creates a new perception of time tied with ‘a sense of loss, of time moving too quickly to fully capture one’s experience as it happens’ {optn// ref.2}. Smartphone photography also forms a new notion of place and placedness. Thanks to the smartphones’ location services, known as global positioning system (GPS), the quality images produced by smartphones carry geotags for the first time. The location where the photograph is taken is, for the first time, recorded in the fabric of the image and images can be arranged by location and not necessarily chronologically [cmd// Roll R-Indx].

{~/Checkpoint 10.03.12}

Am I rambling on? You can tell me when I am. How about a few minutes by {visitor favourite location}? {optn// offer break / continue without break}

Ongoing developments in mobile technology shape and reshape what is expected and possible with smartphones and therefore each new update in the design and technology of smartphones affects the aesthetics of the images they produce. This evolving technology results in what is called ‘a liquid aesthetic’, always in flux and shaped at the meeting point of technology and its hyper-social users {optn// ref.3}.

Soon many mundane moments also become *interesting* and in need of documentation by the 21st century people. These mundane special moments must be saved and brought to the attention of the photographers themselves, their friends, followers and future generations. Pictures of food, pets, empty plates, coffee cups and sunsets become common subjects of photography [cmd// Pump L-Cheek]. Dozens of shots are taken of the same event only to find the right angle. Photography is no

1 Shanks and Svabo, ‘Mobile Media Photography,’ 6.

2 Bay-Cheng, “When this You See,” 49.

3 Dean, ‘Liquid Aesthetic.’



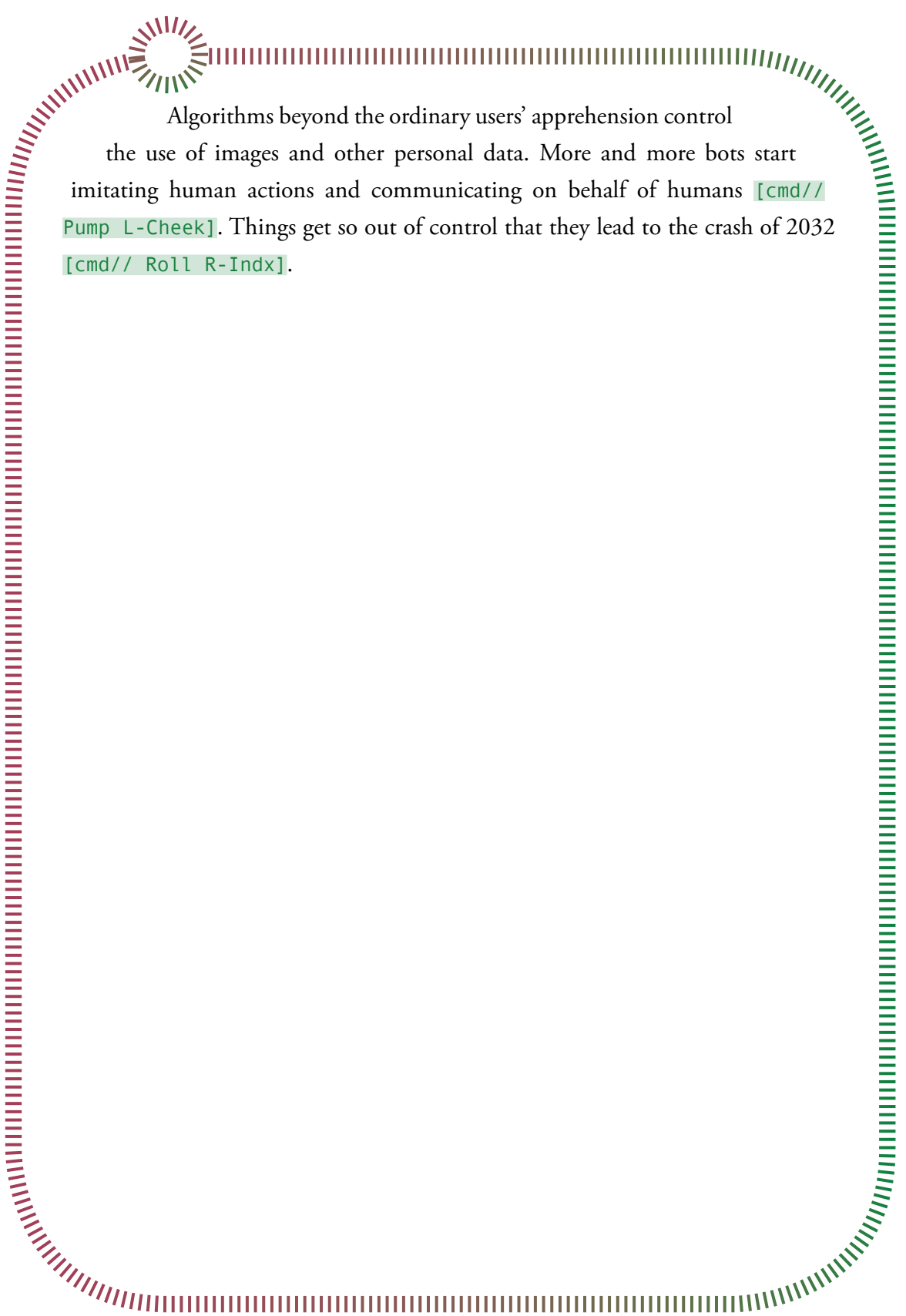
more saved for weddings, birthdays, reunions, travels and other special occasions for which you would carry your camera. Whereas in chemical photography one had to be cautious with their image-making due to the cost and labour of buying and developing films, and with digital cameras you at least needed to remember to have your camera with you, with smartphones taking photos becomes commonplace as part of the fabric of everyday life and soon it threatens to replace our ability to remember anything without taking its photo [cmd// Roll R-Idx].

Everything is uploaded to the Cloud [cmd// Roll R-Idx]. No longer worried about space on their physical hard drives, people store billions of photographs using the new Cloud technology which at the time was deemed eternal but is now amongst the least accessible archives – any web-archaeologist will tell you that the early 21st century Cloud is the hardest and most time-consuming platform to navigate through. Taking photos and recording moments becomes more important than being fully present at an event. Some become professional at taking high quality Instagrammable and Jointable photos specifically made to attract followers on apps like Instagram and Joint [cmd// Roll R-Idx]. Recently discovered records show that in 2019, it cost around 230 British Pounds (equivalent of 6.4CPT) to hire a personal photographer for a six-hour tour and personal Instagram photo shoot in London [cmd// Pump L-Cheek] {optn// ref.1}.

The digital image of an event is so easily made and dispersed that displacement becomes an immediate part of the event. As soon as the event is visible its images are multiplied and dispersed into the world and ‘displaced from [their] site of origin’ {optn// ref.2}. Initially this seems like a democratisation of the dispersal of the document because the majority of people have access to relatively similar networks and devices. But soon new power structures emerge and new modes of generating capital become entangled with the circulation of images and videos.

1 ‘Experience the real London with our experienced photographers and capture your dream London memories’. (Instatours, ‘The Landmark Walk,’ accessed 15 Aug, 2019, <https://www.instatours.uk/the-landmark-walk>).

2 Shanks and Svabo, ‘Archaeology and Photography,’ 11.



Algorithms beyond the ordinary users' apprehension control
the use of images and other personal data. More and more bots start
imitating human actions and communicating on behalf of humans `[cmd//`
`Pump L-Cheek]`. Things get so out of control that they lead to the crash of 2032
`[cmd// Roll R-Indx]`.



Inside the Kneeling Camel

Parce que leur mémoire est courte
les hommes accumulent
d'innombrables pense-bête!

The Arsonist

Because he has a short memory, man amasses
countless memory aids.

Rémo Forlani, *Toute La Mémoire Du Monde*¹

November 1256 CE – Near Meymun Dez – heavy rains

These days I go by the name Ata Malek Juvaini, a historian. I travel with the Mongol rulers and write about their battles. It is no secret that they take great joy in stepping into others' territories. I am now on an expedition to Alamut citadel and Lammasar castle in the mountains of northern Iran accompanying the new Mongol ruler, Hulagu Khan—— Supper break is over, I will continue on the morrow.

December 1256 CE - Alamut Citadel

'Alamut is a mountain which resembles a kneeling camel with its neck resting on the ground'. It is the home to the headquarters of the Ismaili Shias.

Now when I was at the foot of Lammasar [the fortress to the west of Alamut], being desirous of inspecting the library, the fame of which had

¹ Resnais, *Toute La Mémoire Du Monde*.

spread throughout the world, I suggested to the king that the valuable books in Alamut ought not to be destroyed. He approved my words [without asking which books are valuable to me] and gave the necessary orders; and I went to examine the library.¹

The entrance to the library is through a path that is carved into rocks. There is noticeably less snow than is usual for these mountainous areas. The path becomes a corridor going inside the rock. The corridor grows narrower and narrower until it reaches a door. A door so heavy that the pressure of my hand had no effect on it. I threw the weight of my whole body on the door to push it open and enter. The inside is dimly lit with natural light coming in through holes in the walls. The ceilings are so low I felt like I was being suffocated by their pressure. As my eyes adjusted to the light, I estimated that there were at least thirty thousand books in addition to large piles of manuscripts, maps and other objects.

I was reminded of a film I watched seven hundred linear years later shot at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Dark corridors, books behind bars, clunky metal lifts and a never-ending flow of books and periodicals into the library.

1 Juvaini, *Gengis Khan*, 719.

1994
 It's very common
 to hear expressions
 like "Honey,
 your room looks
 like the Mongols
 have attacked".
 They mean
 there is chaos
 and a big
 mess.

'Faced with these bulging repositories,' says the narrator, 'man fears being engulfed by the mass of words.'¹

I started reading all the books from cover to cover. It is odd how this low light is enough for reading, but it is. There is something from every branch of history, astrology, mathematics, philosophy, science, religion and all other fields that could cross a living person's mind in that era. The low light and the abundance of books makes me see faces who are not there and hear voices that are not present. The dark beige walls are speaking to me. A while later, I feel comfortable that I have embodied all that these walls, shelves, books and journals have to share with me. I don't know how long this took.

I extracted a narrow booklet I found hidden inside a larger book. It was a story of two sisters who travelled in unknown lands and entertained the locals by telling them a story every night. This I hid in my cloak and just then I felt the heavy weight of my cloak. I imagined removing all my manly clothes and letting my skin breathe the damp dusty air of the library. I may have removed my robes. It felt like I was down there for many years but it must have been only a few minutes.

1 Ferlani in Resnais, *Toute La Mémoire Du Monde*.

سخن لو کلامی نمانده، بهر شد از سر نمانده
 به باغ اندر سر نمانده، هزار بار و آخر از نماند

To fulfil my promise to the king,

I extracted whatever I found in the way of copies of the Koran and [other] choice books after the manner of “*He brought forth the living from the dead*”. I likewise picked out the astronomical instruments such as *kursis*, armillary spheres, complete and partial astrolabes and other ... that were there. As for the remaining books which related to their [the Ismailis, so called] heresy and error and were neither founded on tradition nor supported by reason, I burnt them all. And although the treasuries were copious and gold and silver goods without limit I recited over them the words: “O yellow, be yellow and O white, be white!” [because I had no intention of taking the yellow gold and the white silver – the lighter I travel the better] and magnanimously shook my sleeve upon them.¹

The flames were beginning to smell and I was letting my skin absorb every grain of it. The dampness made the fire slow and something unknown to me made the flames green and blue.

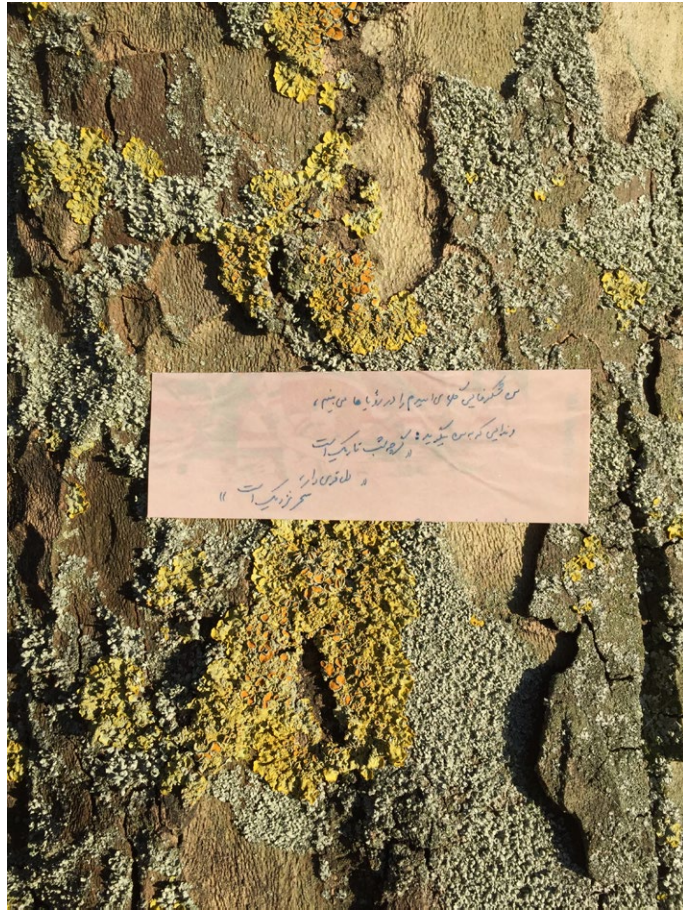
¹ Juvaini, *Gengis Khan*, 719-720.

1258 هـ
Hulagu's siege of
Baghdad
The Grand Library of
Baghdad held countless
manuscripts & books
from medicine to
astronomy. By the
order of Hulagu every
brick of the library
was destroyed. I only
watched from afar as
the troops threw all
the books into Tigris river
in so far as the river turned
black from all the ink and
red from the blood of the
murdered scientists and
philosophers. My new mission
was finding a way to
rebuild Baghdad and I
successfully charmed my
way into becoming the
governor of the city.
(Trautman, Clash of
Civilizations, case 13)

The story of the Arsonist is not only that of terror, fear and violence. The Arsonist writes also of the joy that comes from the fire, the passion. The burning joy of burning. The liberating joy of freeing the archive from its *domiciliation* and *house arrest*, in Derrida's terms. There is a joy in burning the type of archive that Alain Resnais pictures in his film *Toute la mémoire du monde* (1956).

Resnais's short documentary shows the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris as a prison for books, journals, engravings and manuscripts. The film shows the intimidating architecture of the bibliothèque, the thick walls, the fences, the clunky elevators and guards (library staff) dressed like prison guards. Endless numbers of books and newspaper arrive every day at the bibliothèque and there they are sorted, marked and numbered.

'In Paris, words are imprisoned at the Bibliothèque Nationale', says the narrator. A prison that constantly takes up more space in underground tunnels and goes higher in the sky to avoid exploding from its growing number of inmates. The inmates whose identification is a work in progress in the hundred-and-eighty-one-volume catalogue. All these printed material are stored and long tedious processes for categorising and borrowing are invented so that the readers can find and put together fragments of the secret of 'happiness'. The readers are searching for a slice of happiness but the way Resnais pictures and speaks of the bibliothèque, he seems to suggest that there is much more happiness outside or without this expanding house of universal memory. But let us not forget that the state archive or national libraries are only one form of archive and not the definition of the word. That is also why the Arsonist insists that they are not against archives but rather embrace the concept as an open-ended platform for making and creating.



The Books Inside

Anahid Ravanpoor

On Itinerant Storytellers as Living Archives

The anonymous writers of *The Thousand Nights and One Night* describe Shahrzād as such:

[Shahrzād] had perused the books, annals and legends of preceding Kings, and the stories, examples and instances of bygone men and things; indeed it was said that she had collected a thousand books of histories relating to antique races and departed rulers. She had perused the works of the poets and knew them by heart; she had studied philosophy and the sciences, arts and accomplishments.¹

Shahrzād is a living archive. Not in the Freudian sense that all bodies (and minds) are living archives but more precisely she is an embodiment of a specific archive of stories and poetry transmitted to her in writing and orally. She has collected and memorised a *thousand* books of poetry, history, philosophy, science and arts. She has also listened to many stories; in the beginning of most of her stories she says “I heard” that so and so did that and that. So she is not only a skilled storyteller but also a skilled listener who has been able to listen to and memorise so many stories.

I am tempted to add that the array of knowledge transmitted to Shahrzād is not limited to stories and poetry but extends to gestures and voices. Imagine an old woman has confided in Shahrzād a secret story of her youth: “*Just as I caressed the bird’s wings ...*” says the woman to Shahrzād. Wouldn’t Shahrzād recount this story to the king with an effort to reflect the voice and tone of the woman? Wouldn’t she try to re-enact the woman’s bird caressing gesture and the suspicious look in her eyes that foretold something unexpected is about to happen? She must

1 Burton, *Thousand Nights and a Night*, 6:46.

have also re-enacted the voices and gestures of the characters she had read about in books. Shahrzād, I believe, is the embodiment of the thousand books she has read and the stories she has been told, plus their gestures and voices. She is the coming together of the textual and the embodied. With these re-enactments, her body becomes a performing body who performs (as) a (living) archive.

It is never mentioned that Shahrzād consults any books during the thousand days she is with the king. All the words and gestures she uses she knows by heart. Like the griots of West Africa to whom people and families confide their personal/oral histories, Shahrzād is the sum of all the stories she has read and heard.¹ The stories that have been confided in her in the various places where she has lived and passed through during the long life of her character across times and places from Iranian agricultural myths to medieval Cairo. She is an ever-evolving performative container for the multiple voices she holds and repeats in her stories. Like the earth at the bottom of the river that travels with the push of the water, Shahrzād passes through places and times with the help of Dīnāzād. She appears in various guises and crosses cultures both in her transcultural stories and in the ongoing translations of herself from ancient Iran to medieval Islam, romantic Europe, the creative additions of Jalal Toufic and Mishandled Archive.² She thus comes in a lineage of the *gōsāns*, the itinerant storytellers who roamed from place to place, gathered stories and recounted them with song and music in ancient Iran.³

1 *Jèl'* or *griot* are the minstrels of West Africa who memorise and perform histories with music. They go from house to house, telling stories and adding new stories to their collection. Cameroonian composer and writer, Francis Bebey, writes that 'the *griot* knows everything that is going on and he [*sic*] can recall events that are no longer in living memory. He [*sic*] is a living archive of his [*sic*] people's traditions' (Bebey, *African Music*, 24).

2 For how Toufic emends *The Thousand Nights and One Night* through creative writing rather than historical or archival research, see Toufic, *What is the Sum*, 12.

3 Beyzaei, *Hezar Afsan Kojast?*, 230.

The gōsāns, also known as *khonyagars*, were minstrels of ancient Iran whose counterparts also appeared in Armenia and Georgia. They have played a crucial role in keeping alive the Iranian oral tradition since the ancient times.¹ Ravanpoor only mentions them in passing and there is, indeed, need for further scholarship on the history of the gōsāns in Iran and their evolution and challenges to this date. Mary Boyce describes the gōsāns as such:

entertainer of king and commoner, privileged at court and popular with the people; present at the graveside and at the feast; eulogist, satirist, story-teller, musician; recorder of past achievements, and commentator of his [*sic*] own times.²

A real or fictitious letter from Parmenion, a Macedonian general in Alexander's army, cited by Athenaeus, states that after the Battle of Issus between the armies of Alexander and Darius III, Parmenion captured hundred and twenty-nine women musicians amongst others.³ Sassanian rock reliefs in Taq Bostan also show groups of women-harpists and singers. I wonder if the Arsonist met any of them.

What is fascinating about the gōsāns is that they also commentate on the events of their own times. Through these performative commentaries, they can be seen as creative critics whose critique is presented as a live performance with music and storytelling. In the following section, Ravanpoor arrives at a similar characterisation of Shahrzād – that of the creative critic or the critical artist – although she arrives at this point through another path.⁴

1 Boyce, 'Parthian Gosan,' 12.

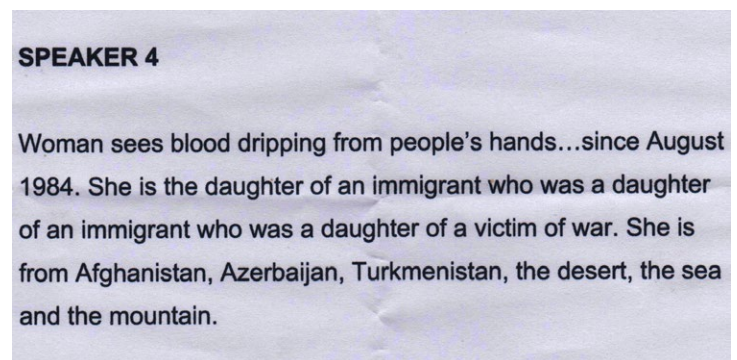
2 Boyce, 17-18.

3 Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* 8.87.

4 For more on creative criticism, see Benson and Connors, *Creative Criticism*; and Hilevaara and Orley, *The Creative Critic*.

The itinerant quality of collecting and dispersing stories through which Ravanpoor, after Beyzaei, connects Shahrzād to the gōsāns is another link between Shahrzād and Mishandled Archive. The performative storytelling which in the case of the gōsāns is performed through music and in the case of Mishandled Archive through dance, goes hand in hand with the itinerant nature of both practices – one reflected in the diverse transcultural stories of the likes of Shahrzād and the other in the daily travelling archive and artworks as well as the frame story in which the archive is said to have originated from two sisters who travel through mountains, rivers and deserts.

It is also worth noting the following text that was given to audience members at the live performances of Mishandled Archive, requesting that they translate it into their native languages:



In this participatory translation task, the text and the action of translation play with the boundaries of access through language and once again bring itinerancy and travelling into Mishandled Archive, this time via a daughter of an immigrant who is from the desert, the sea and the mountains. The text which was never performed or published in English by Fatehi Irani was retained by an audience member who translated it to Mandarin at one of the performances.

Another point to be noted in the above text is that there is mention of a woman who sees blood. This raises a question: What could be the connection between this text and the hashtag #YouShallSeeBlood that Wang Shu

discovers? That hashtag is used on an image of a little girl. Perhaps #YouShallSeeBlood is some kind of a performative prophecy for the little girl who will grow to see blood dripping from people's hands after August 1984. Whatever might have happened on that date – we don't know.

Anahid Ravanpoor

On Collaboration

Jalal Toufic suggests that Shahrzād's storytelling, in addition to, and in spite of, all the books she has read and collected, is a collaboration between her and the thousand one-night wives of the king whose stories she is repeating. In Toufic's reading, there is a collaboration between the living storyteller and the dead; the dead about whom she has read in the books and the dead, the wives, who may have told her their stories. I even imagine that stories of these thousand doomed dead women had spread throughout the country, from body to body and whispered ear to ear in fear of being heard by the king. Such is the way that these stories found their way into Shahrzād's ears and memory. As Toufic writes 'she could not have come up with these lifesaving stories except by drawing on the deaths of the previous one thousand one-night wives of King Shahrzād'.¹

Shahrzād's only access to these wives is through their archival residues because they are already dead. Here the archive is also a repertoire. Not only its stories are based on a repertoire of oral stories but also the embodied acts and the whispered words are part of the archival residues that are transformed to and through Shahrzād. Shahrzād collaborates with these past women through an archival imagination that renders her into the sum of the one thousand dead wives of the king and the one thousand books she

¹ Toufic, *Two or Three Things*, 102

embodies. Thus, she is simultaneously dead-alive-archive-body.

Add to this the chances of Shahrzād inventing (i.e. improvising) new stories based on all that she has read and heard. As Toufic suggests, the king could have easily asked the scholars, historians and other storytellers of the kingdom for the continuation or the ending of the stories that Shahrzād left unfinished every night. If the king could figure out the remainder of the story, Shahrzād's life and storytelling would be useless for the king. Therefore, in order to save her life, Shahrzād had to come up with new stories in addition to all she had read and heard.¹ As a storyteller, Shahrzād thus becomes what Shoshana Felman would call an 'inventive and attentive witness'.² She becomes archive, body and creator in one. As a person who has studied the archive and is creating new artworks from it, she becomes a critical artist or a creative critic – one who creatively responds to her socio-political environment drawing on resources in archive and repertoire.

YZ

Ravanpoor does not define what she means by the terms *archive* and *repertoire* or how she differentiates between the two, if she does. Diana Taylor has famously explored these two realms of remembering in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Taylor differentiates between the archive as knowledge which is transmitted through 'supposedly enduring material' (such as texts, films, bones, archaeological remains, CDs, etc) and the repertoire as 'so-called ephemeral' embodied practices and knowledge which are transmitted through the body such as dance, gestures, singing, sports, performances, orality and all that is

1 Toufic, 136-137.

2 Felman, 'Fire in the Archive,' 56.

thought of as ‘nonreproducible’.¹ Taylor’s distinction is useful particularly in the face of imperial archives and with the aim of establishing the value of the repertoire as an equally important cultural resource worthy of attention, investigation, preservation and investment. Her distinction articulates how the imperial archive, archives of colonialism in service of the spread of capitalism, denounced embodied forms of memory as illegitimate and inadequate means of history in need of material or non-bodily means of preservation which was offered by the imperial archive only to records that sustained the legitimacy of the colonial and capitalist image. This archive/repertoire distinction can be specifically helpful in environments where there are longer established oral traditions or in places where efforts towards unbiased archiving is either not a priority or a possibility.²

According to Taylor, archival memory separates ‘the source of “knowledge” from the knower – in time and/or place’.³ An archival record can be accessed by people far removed by spatial or temporal distance from the creation (and creator) of the record – visitors to an archive have no affiliation or knowledge of the creator of the knowledge that is being transmitted to them. Therefore by eliminating a knowing *body* (susceptible to misinterpretation and other human deficiencies) and presenting in its stead a durable *object*, the archive performs a seemingly unbiased, but in fact intensely biased, aerial view of history. The repertoire on the other hand ‘requires presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by “being there,” being a part of the transmission.’⁴ Taylor differentiates the supposedly stable objects in the archive from the ever-changing actions of the repertoire, which

1 Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*, 19-20.

2 This is not to say that a fully unbiased archive is at all possible. No archive is eternally safe from corruption and political manipulations. Even at the most unbiased cases, selection, omission and curation in the archive will inherently take one direction at the expense of others.

3 Taylor, 19.

4 Taylor, 20.

are transmitted from body to body. In her words, ‘the repertoire both keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning’.¹

Although Taylor is trying not to succumb to the binaries of archive and repertoire, the book – from its title to the on-going divisions drawn between its two poles – pulls us into a binary understanding. Taylor’s distinction is useful in understanding the role, dynamics, values and modes of assimilation and preservation (i.e. continuation) of both the archive and the repertoire and particularly in viewing the ephemeral not as things that disappear or are lost but as acts that are transferred and remain in ways other than those of the ‘archive of supposedly enduring materials’.² For Taylor,

there is an advantage to thinking about a repertoire performed through dance, theatre, song, ritual, witnessing, healing practices, memory paths, and the many other forms of repeatable behaviors as something that cannot be housed or contained in the archive.³

As Rebecca Schneider emphasises, however, if there is ‘an advantage’ in separating the archive and the repertoire, and in assuming the repertoire as uncontainable in the archive, we are repeating the age-old definition of archival power and the archive/repertoire binaried relationship where the archive as ‘the hegemonic power’ remains and the repertoire as ‘the anti-hegemonic’ moves on. This distinction creates a binary divide between writing and performance where one works across distance and the other needs presence ‘as if writing were not an embodied act, nor an embodied encounter across time, and as if performance were not discursive (nor discourse performative or “performatic”)’.⁴ Taylor’s articulation of the opposition between the two (archive/repertoire,

1 Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*, 20.

2 Taylor, 19.

3 Taylor, 36.

4 Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 106-107.

writing/performance) thus contradicts her attempts in not solidifying such a binary.

Where Taylor works to demonstrate the repertoire as another kind of archive and in need of similar attention, Schneider proposes a twin effort of 'situating the archive as *another kind of performance*'.¹ The archive carries residues of past embodiments and is therefore part of an embodied repertoire. 'Particular modes of being human', Schneider says, 'are reperformed from body to body, or body to object to body, or object to object to object, dragging along with it histories of prior intra-actions'.² This constant exchange between bodies and objects is the exchange between the archive and the repertoire which may erase the binaried division between the two. The 'histories of prior intra-actions' are that which allow us to see all archives as repertoire based. Archives 'like theatres, [...] choreograph what is endangered and/or what is valued'.³ They decide what is going to be *domesticated* (to use Derrida's term) and how. The same intra-action can be seen among the histories, objects (photographs/ documents), sites and dances in *Mishandled Archive* where all of these elements are constantly generated from within their relationships in a way that it is impossible to draw a linear process of influence from one to another.

Ravanpoor seems to be suggesting that the ongoing transformations of *A Thousand Tales*, Shahrzād and Dīnāzād throughout history – in between oral, written, performed and epic forms – tell us of a more fluid exchange of knowledge between bodies (liveness) and objects (stillness) than what can be gained from a rigid separation of the two. In other words, they suggest a more blurred division and an ongoing exchange between the two modes of generating and transmitting knowledge: the archive and the repertoire. Also, Shahrzād's storytelling,

1 Schneider, 108.

2 Schneider, 'Limb to Limb.' For more on the term *intra-action*, see Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 141. Barad uses *intra-action* to refer to the constant exchange and influence between things where they materialise from within the intra-active relation not before or outside of it (such as in interaction).

3 Schneider, 'Limb to Limb.'

and therefore micro-activism and emancipation, only happen at the site of the cohabitation of the archive and the repertoire. Where she draws on all possible body to body and body to object connections – through perusing a thousand books and engaging with the dead wives of the king and the people of the passages – she becomes a creator who can formulate a survival strategy through art. Here, she is linked back to the creative critic and the *gōsāns*.

Anahid Ravanpoor

On Theatricality and Tricks

Beyzaei writes of the several theatrical properties used by the pair of women in their various epic, religious, mythic and street transformations. According to him, the women use mask plays, mime, dance, singing, music and repeated mantras in their storytelling. They are cultured and well-spoken and have command over the art of speech which is the key to saving them from death. Beyzaei suggests that the names of Sang-havak and Arenavak (Shahrzād and Dīnāzād's Avestan variations) who as mentioned earlier have the name of Vāk, the goddess of speech, song and voice, in their name, mean “deep-toned” and “soft-toned” respectively. This suggests a form of musical duet recitation of stories by the two women which fits well with the ancient practices of singing the Avesta as duets. The two women are using various performative elements using their bodies, voices and objects to entertain and soothe their incarcerator.¹

What Beyzaei does not mention here is how Shahrzād turns her own and Dīnāzād's lives into a performance for a thousand nights. In response to the hostile environment they are living in, Shahrzād devises a performative task for herself and her sister

1 Beyzaei, *Hezar Afsan Kojast?*, 191-97, 136.

and starts a long run of a play in which she plays the role of the storytelling wife of the king for a thousand nights. Through her repetitive actions she embraces an ongoing theatricality in her life and creates one of the longest running non-stop performances of endurance. A performance that is inseparable from her life. Her decision to marry the king is the beginning of this performance.

An important point we should not forget about Shahrzād is that she is a trickster. No matter how good her deeds are, she is playing a trick on the king for a thousand or so nights. She is also making the king, and us, believe that she believes in the stories she is telling. Shahriar may not notice this in his late-night fatigue but we should know that Shahrzād could have changed every single story to make it more appealing to the king. Even if she is telling stories of the thousand dead wives or the people of the streets, she is still the only master (mistress) of the stories and most probably manipulates the tales in order to make a more engaging performance for the king. This manipulation is different from the day stories commissioned by the kings. Shahriar does not want to hear the stories he knows but rather needs unexpected twists and turns.

Like the trickster that Lewis Hyde writes of in *Trickster Makes This World*, Shahrzād is ‘always on the road’. I refer to Hyde’s study of the trickster because his methodology of thinking through myths and stories as generative sources of knowledge is similar to both Beyzaei’s approach and to the task I have set myself to do. Hyde’s writing allows different myths to ‘think one another’ – each story thinks (with/of) another story and another and another – a method of creative thinking that we must be familiar with by now.¹ The trickster, writes Hyde,

does not live in the halls of justice, the soldier’s tent,
the shaman’s hut, the monastery. He passes through
each of these when there is a moment of silence.²

1 Hyde, ‘Lewis Hyde: Trickster.’

2 Hyde, *Trickster Makes this World*, 6.

Whether the road is in fact a road, a passageway in the city or the country where Shahrzād passes through as a travelling storyteller, or a road in the imagination through which she takes the king to a different distant place and time every night, Shahrzād is always in passing. For if she stays too long in a place and time the king will be bored and her life would be over.

There are differences between Shahrzād and the mythic figure of the trickster that Hyde is describing. Nonetheless, Shahrzād shares several qualities of the trickster: travelling, going against social norms, amorality and of course playing tricks.¹ She shows an intelligence for negotiating what Hyde calls ‘spaces of heightened uncertainty’.² Every night she is negotiating with the king for her (and other women’s) life. Every night the story of Shahrzād (not the one she is telling but the one in which she is a character) lands on the same line:

morning overtook Shahrazad, and she lapsed into silence.³

At this ‘moment of silence’, just like Hyde suggested, Shahrzād passes through to another time or place – because the show must go on and for that to happen she needs to move. She ‘can move between heaven and earth, and between the living and the dead’.⁴ She moves between her living body and the dead wives of the king and finds a way for the dead to roam amongst the living through her and her stories.

1 Shahrzād goes against the social norms by offering herself to the king against her father’s will and plays a trick on the king with Dināzād. Her nightly stories according to Beyzaei were much more amoral (tricksterish) in the pre-Islamic era and the moral judgements and lessons have been added to the stories later to save the stories from total eradication (Beyzaei, *Hezar Afsan Kojast?*, 34); cf. Hyde, *Trickster Makes this World*, 6–10.

2 Hyde, 6.

3 Mahdi and Haddawy, *The Arabian Nights*.

4 Hyde, 6.



A Taster for the
Non-Divergent Live
and Still



Wang Shu

{~/Checkpoint 10.03.13}

{go// Hallway-MX0 environment}

You mentioned you are interested in {visitor likes}. How do you feel about going a little off-route again? {optn// offer visitor off-routes}

{optn// sample-off-route/NHZ*8}

Through that {red / metal / green / glass / melting / locked} door, you can join a conversation on the relations and intersection between photography and theatre. You can speak to Roland Barthes, Rebecca Schneider, Michael Shanks, Connie Svabo, Shahrzad Etemadi, Tina Campt and Dana Khetran to name a few and see them all in conversation with each other. This is a unique transgenerational discussion and it feels to me like something you would enjoy.

{optn// offer visitor conversation}

I knew you would be interested. I can give you a taster of the room from outside before you make any decisions. Of course, your presence in the room will change the course of the conversation and you'll need to participate. Don't stress out, we can offer you all the verbal means to become part of the conversation if you decide to go in. {~/recalibrate categorical bias}

{optn// sample-off-route/NHZ*8/taster} Look through that window and I'll tell you what I gathered last time I was in there. Just so that you know, if you're going in, you're going alone. I'll wait for you at the lounge on UG floor:

{go// window}

{merge// Roland-Barthes/Michael-Shanks/Connie-Svabo/Rebecca-Schneider/Shahrzad-Etemadi/Tina-Campt/Dana-Khetran}

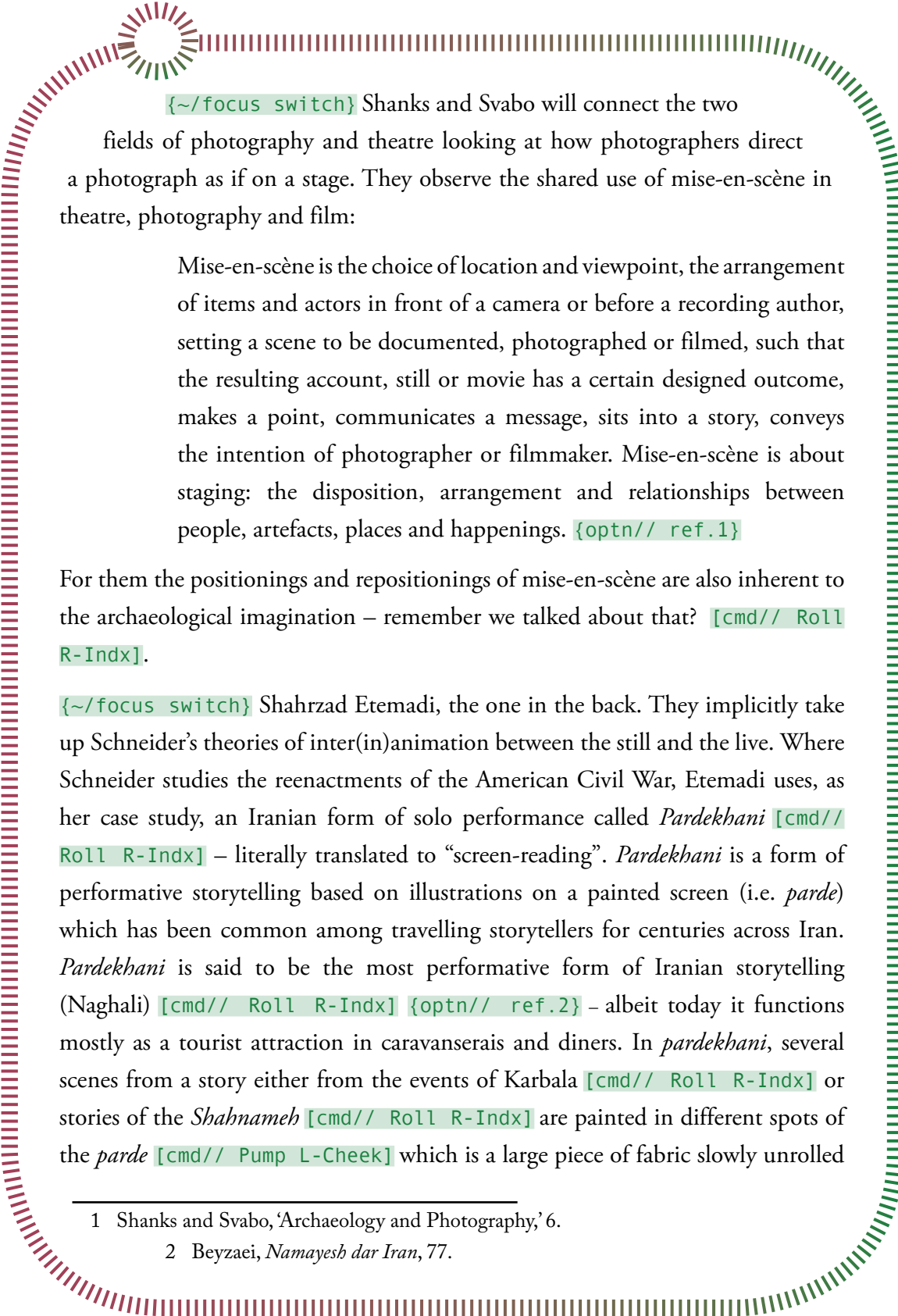
{~/focus switch} That is Roland Barthes. They always want to be in this conversation and they make some interesting points, I think. They

will connect photography with theatre through each of their relations to 'death'. Remember, this person can be very persuasive in their argument. They will suggest that the first actors were playing the role of the dead either wearing a mask or by painting their faces. For example, 'the man with the painted face in the Chinese theater [cmd// Roll R-Indx], the rice-paste makeup of the Indian Katha Kali [cmd// Roll R-Indx], the Japanese No mask [cmd// Roll R-Indx]' ... For them, photography is, like theatre, a representation of death. Barthes will argue that no matter how hard we try to capture life with photography, through the act of capturing, we seem to be turning life into death. Therefore, for Barthes, 'photography is a kind of primitive theater, a kind of *Tableau Vivant*, a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead' {optn// ref.1}.

{~/focus switch} That's Rebecca Schneider. They will suggest moving beyond the traditional, Barthian, *photography-equals-death* view and suggest that we focus on the shared element of *liveness* between *tableaux vivants* and photographs where they both make room for new compositions of historical tales. Considering that *tableau vivant* means *living* tableaux, not *dead*, I would say they have a good argument. {~/post-prediction adjustment} In Schneider's approach, photography connects to theatre by way of being live and suggesting live interactions and new futures, not by being *still* where still is equalled to dead, lost and unreturnable. Schneider rejects the distinction between live arts and the still arts and suggests that the inter(in)animation [cmd// Roll R-Indx] between the two is far too developed to allow a distinct separation: from the Greek theatre's use of *skene* [cmd// Roll R-Indx] which influenced the structure of the camera obscura [cmd// Roll R-Indx] to the live act of a person passing through still statues that animates the statues and their stories, the live and the still, the animate and the inanimate, are inseparable for Schneider and in constant inter(in)animation {optn// ref.2}.

1 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 31-32.

2 Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 143-145.



{~/focus switch} Shanks and Svabo will connect the two fields of photography and theatre looking at how photographers direct a photograph as if on a stage. They observe the shared use of mise-en-scène in theatre, photography and film:

Mise-en-scène is the choice of location and viewpoint, the arrangement of items and actors in front of a camera or before a recording author, setting a scene to be documented, photographed or filmed, such that the resulting account, still or movie has a certain designed outcome, makes a point, communicates a message, sits into a story, conveys the intention of photographer or filmmaker. Mise-en-scène is about staging: the disposition, arrangement and relationships between people, artefacts, places and happenings. {optn// ref.1}

For them the positionings and repositionings of mise-en-scène are also inherent to the archaeological imagination – remember we talked about that? [cmd// Roll R-Idx].

{~/focus switch} Shahrzad Etemadi, the one in the back. They implicitly take up Schneider's theories of inter(in)animation between the still and the live. Where Schneider studies the reenactments of the American Civil War, Etemadi uses, as her case study, an Iranian form of solo performance called *Pardekhani* [cmd// Roll R-Idx] – literally translated to “screen-reading”. *Pardekhani* is a form of performative storytelling based on illustrations on a painted screen (i.e. *parde*) which has been common among travelling storytellers for centuries across Iran. *Pardekhani* is said to be the most performative form of Iranian storytelling (Naghali) [cmd// Roll R-Idx] {optn// ref.2} – albeit today it functions mostly as a tourist attraction in caravanserais and diners. In *pardekhani*, several scenes from a story either from the events of Karbala [cmd// Roll R-Idx] or stories of the *Shahnameh* [cmd// Roll R-Idx] are painted in different spots of the *parde* [cmd// Pump L-Cheek] which is a large piece of fabric slowly unrolled

1 Shanks and Svabo, 'Archaeology and Photography,' 6.

2 Beyzaei, *Namayesh dar Iran*, 77.

and revealed by the performer. The performer, known as *pardekhān*, performs the story of each scene by playing the role of the narrator and all the other characters in the story [cmd// Roll R-Indx] {optn// ref.1}. The arts of painting and performative storytelling have for hundreds of years been interconnected in *pardekhāni*. Etemadi talks about how in this artform the supposedly live and the so-called still activate each other to a degree that a distinction between the two becomes irrelevant {optn// ref.2}. [cmd// Roll R-Indx]

{~/focus switch} Tina Campt – by the window. They propose a method of opening ourselves to the affects of images by going beyond what we see [cmd// Roll R-Indx]. They focus specifically on historically dismissed identification photography from overlooked archives of black communities [cmd// Pump L-Cheek] {optn// ref.3}. Campt suggests a practice of listening to these seemingly mute and quotidian images. Through a methodology that she describes as ‘listening’, we are given ‘access to the affective registers through which these images enunciate alternate accounts of their subjects’ {optn// ref.4}.

{~/focus switch} Dana Khetran – they are really exciting. They will discuss their recent book *Losing Touch*. They will talk about photography’s move from an image on glass, metal and paper to pixels on screens and neural-images in the brain. Khetran discusses how the sense of touch of the material photo has been gradually replaced by neurological commands. Unlike the touch of the hand that needs an outside stimulus to induce a feeling, these neurological commands trigger a feeling of touch from inside the human and non-human body [cmd// Roll R-Indx]. Khetran discusses late 21st century photography as a fully embodied practice, only possible through and because of the body that internalises the image. Here any distinction between the living body and the object of the photograph

1 Beyzaei, *Namayesh dar Iran*, 77.

2 Etemadi, *Unlamenting*, 89-107.

3 Campt, *Listening to Images*, 3.

4 Campt, 5.



seems counterintuitive to the function of photography

`{optn// ref.1}`.

As a premium visitor you will also have access to invite: Susan Sontag to elaborate on the photography/death-mask relation `{optn// ref.2}`, Audrey Linkman to offer uncanny examples of photographing the dead `{optn// ref.3}`, Fred Moten to unpack the notion of interinanimation `{optn// ref.4}` and Tinouche Kalé to read from their poem *Imagine Their Hand* `{optn// ref.5}`. You also have the option to replace Barthes with Margaret Iverson for a change `{optn// ref.6}`.

`{~/recalibrate collaborative filtering}`

1 Khetran, *Losing Touch*.

2 Sontag, *On Photography*, 120.

3 Linkman, *Photography and Death*.

4 Moten, *In the Break*.

5 Kalé, 'They Call Me Pear, Luv!.'

6 Iversen, 'What is a Photograph?.'



**Raise Your Arm In
The Air, And Swing.**

In 2020, Tara Fatehi Irani planned to produce a book dedicated to Mishandled Archive. The idea was for the book to host visual material – photographs and handwritten scores – from the year-long phase interspersed with short written accounts of the artist's encounters while making the daily pieces. A few writers and artists were also invited to respond to the project in writing. 'To write with and think through Mishandled Archive', read the invitation to the contributors. The book was never published due to funding and organisational issues. Abiodun Tagoe, one of the contributors to the book, has kindly provided a draft of her contribution to the book and a part of her correspondence with Fatehi Irani. With the publishing plans falling through, the draft was not developed beyond what is available in the following pages. Publishing it for the first time in its draft form is an attempt in celebrating the unfinished piece and its open-endedness.

Abiodun Tagoe

From: Abiodun Tagoe <abiodun.tagoe@gmail.com>

Sent: 28 January 2020 2:55

To: Tara Fatehi Irani <info@tarafatehi.com>

My Dear

Sorry for the gap in our communications. I have been a bit all over the place—literally. A month in Nigeria. Few days in Italy. Then Colombia, now Mexico. I am sending you this draft of my response as you requested. I don't consider it finished. It certainly reflects my scattered mind in the past couple of months but then again maybe that's not a bad thing. I certainly enjoyed writing *with* your Mishandled Archive ... particularly focusing on how dances, scores and photographs come together under the rubric of gesture, something I've been meaning to focus on for a while. Let me know what you think ... xx Abi



Mishandled Archive, Toynbee Studios, London, 2019, photographed by Jemima Yong

SCENE 1

On the other platform, across the railway, a woman raises her arm in the air. The rest of her body is swinging, hanging from this arm. Her swinging body and the gesture of the hand in the air is moving but misplaced at a south London train station waiting for a delayed Southern service. The gesture is moving because it moves her (rather obviously); it moves the air around her (perhaps less obviously); it moves others present in the scene who turn their necks to watch her, or roll their eyes to momentarily glance at her; it also moves something perhaps only in one person on this side of the rails who is tempted to try this arm movement and is imagining what would happen if everyone put their bags, umbrellas and newspapers down and raised their arms in the air, swinging their bodies making their own iteration of this movement.

SCENE 2

A gesture, like a wave, is at once an act composed in and capable of reiteration, but also an action extended, opening the possibility of future alteration.

Rebecca Schneider, 'That the Past May Yet Have Another Future'¹

Writing in response to the Black Lives Matter Movement and the gesture of hands raised in the air, "hands up", in protest against violence towards Black communities, Rebecca

1 Schneider, 'Past May Yet,' 286.

Schneider writes of gestures through the rubric of ‘call and response’.¹ Starting with – and going beyond – call-and-response as an antiphony in the musical context, I am more intrigued by how it can weave past and future together in what Schneider calls ‘intervallic resonance’. ‘To call the past to appear for account,’ she writes, ‘or to be called by the past to respond with account, is rich with possibilities’.²

The word gesture suggests a movement of a body part or the whole body, a pose or posture, an action performed to convey a meaning or feeling and a moving of one body toward another. In all of its many interpretations, a gesture, Rebecca Schneider suggests, is always geared towards a future encounter. It is therefore always inaugurating a response and new relations as it is ‘composed in and capable of reiteration’.³ Schneider phrases this reiterative quality and being in a web of call-and-response as ‘gestural response-ability’ – the gesture’s ability to respond and call for response.⁴ Such is the movement of the arm and swinging body that reverberated and jumped across the railway as an image, a thought and a movement – a gesture offering itself to be taken up and reperformed by others.

SCENE 3

We said, here we are. They said, you are still alive. We said, yes, yes we are still alive. How lemon, they said, how blue like fortune. We took the bottle of rum from our veins, we washed their faces, we sewed their thin skins. We were pilgrims, they were gods. They said with wonder and admiration, you are still alive, like hydrogen, like oxygen.

Dionne Brand, *Verso* 55⁵

A meeting with the ancestors in the prison cells at the door of no return – the last stop in the transatlantic slave trade. An encounter between those who centuries later return from the diaspora and those who were held captive in the fort. In the otherwise empty silent rooms of the fort, Brand sees those captives of the past regather. In *wonder* and *admiration* of their visitors, their descendants, being still alive, they, the gods, the ancestors, liken them, the visitors, the children of the diaspora, to hydrogen and oxygen – always around them, always present where life is. From where we stand, reading Brand, we also wonder in admiration that the *ancestors* are still alive, present in the empty cells. They, like oxygen, like nitrogen, like hydrogen, like carbon, like calcium are still around us and in conversation with their

1 In ‘Past May Yet’ Schneider is echoing Thomas DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez’s use of call-and-response in *Black Performance Theory*.

2 Schneider, ‘Past May Yet,’ 300.

3 Schneider, ‘Past May Yet,’ 286.

4 Schneider, ‘In Our Hands’.

5 Brand, ‘Blue Clerk,’ 44.

descendants. They are not in the past and not past. They, in Christina Sharpe's words, are from 'a past that is not past, a past that is with us still', 'a past that', in Saadiya Hartman's words, 'has yet to be done' and in Schneider's words, 'is not (entirely) dead' and 'can be accessed live'.¹ A past that is not always a heavy weight pounding on our heads and hearts but also active and fluid, like oxygen, inviting us to and encouraging us for being alive. To engage with this living (even though melancholic) past is not necessarily an invitation to melancholia but rather an invitation to a future where things can be made otherwise.

A gesture in the double quality of being both a call and a response is always in relation to a past (that 'is not past', that 'has yet to be done') and a future. Gesture thus moves not only forward in time to reach a body that encounters it or backward in time to pay homage to a past person/event. It also moves, Schneider suggests, 'laterally', transversally, across time.² It takes steps to the side in what Fred Moten calls 'a necessary appositionality'.³ There is an element of besideness in moving laterally and appositionally and, as Eve Kosofsky reminds us, an element of touch in besideness. 'To touch', Kosofsky writes, 'is always already to reach out' – that is to initiate and anticipate contact and response.⁴

Schneider writes of gestures as 'ongoing body-jumping performances that have the potential to carry history in different directions'. Every gesture is then dispersing history at each iteration and in doing so it calls for responses and opens 'the possibility of future alteration'.⁵ This alteration happens to the gesture, the history it carries, and the future – one that forms in the intra-action of the gesture with the past and the bodies who perform and receive it.⁶ Schneider suggests that gestures, as resurgence or as call-and-response, are not only a trace of the past, a documentation of what has been, but they are alternative futures of a past that themselves suggest an 'open-ended response-ability' and 'provoke change in multiple directions'.⁷ Gestures are thus alive and encourage live intra-actions with other bodies and things. Through their open-ended response-ability (to the past and the future), gestures and the bodies through which they resurge, undergo alterations – they make new contacts, stand with new bodies and take on new meanings.

1 Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 62; Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts,' 13; and Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 17.

2 Schneider, 'Past May Yet,' 293.

3 Moten, *In the Break*, 34.

4 Kosofsky-Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 14.

5 Schneider, 286.

6 Karen Barad's uses of the term 'intra-action' suggests that agency and identity are not inherent to individual beings but rather created through relation. For more on this, see Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, 141.

7 Schneider, 306, 286.

SCENE 4

Gestures migrate (as well as disappear) and [...] in migrating they create unexpected combinations, new valences, and alternative cultural meanings and experiences. In a world of inescapable global circulation, gestures, too, undergo appropriations and enjoy afterlives that change their initial function.

Carrie Noland, *Migration of Gestures*¹

The arm that swings on the railway platform moves the air around it. It moves the dust that hovers in the air and does not sediment. It moves the nitrogen, the oxygen, the hydrogen. And if *the past that is not past* reappears in the *oxygen* and the *hydrogen*, as Sharpe and Brand write, then the gesture of the arm in the air is also moving *the past that is not past* – the past that is in the air around us. Through this movement, it can move the past aside and change its course. The arms flowing in the air are a call that can perhaps alter the past and bring forth other possible futures not yet realised. The gesture of the arms jumps (migrates) from body to body across the railway and passes, albeit with alterations, through another body who embodies and experiences it differently. Through the gestures that disperse histories and shift the past that is floating around us, we can imagine, perform and create what Schneider, after Ashon Crawley, calls ‘a future “otherwise”’.² The afterlife of the migrating gesture which emerges through contact and call-and-response can thus be *enjoyed*, as Noland says, rather than tolerated.

SCENE 5

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Western bourgeoisie had definitely lost its gestures.

Giorgio Agamben, ‘Notes on Gesture’³

Giorgio Agamben opens his ‘Notes on Gesture’ with the above epigraph. But by the end of the first segment of the text, where the next epigraph comes in, this epigraph almost feels like a joke. A statement that the reader, or perhaps just I, wishes Agamben would make explicit via philosophy and sociology but instead he talks about the loss of control of gestures to ataxia, dystonia and tics. But in spite of his narrow view on the various manifestation of gestures, Agamben, by suggesting that the Western bourgeoisie had lost its gestures, at least alludes to the possibility of this loss. If this loss, of the Western bourgeois gesture, did not happen in the way that satisfies me (the black feminist reader of Agamben) at the time that

1 Noland and Ness, *Migrations of Gestures*, x.

2 Schneider, ‘Past May Yet,’ 289.

3 Agamben, ‘Notes on Gesture,’ 48.

Agamben suggests (the end of the nineteenth century), perhaps we can make it happen in our ‘times of hands up’.¹

In *Experiments in Exile*, Laura Harris writes of blackness and what she calls an ‘aesthetic black sociality’ – a mode of being together and making together that becomes possible through the contact and congregation of the excluded and the different. Blackness therefore does not stop at the boundaries of being biologically and genetically black but rather extends to the *motley crew*, to use Harris’s term, who don’t fit in the modern bourgeois models of citizenship and aesthetics envisaged by European thought.² In this inclusive blackness, that paradoxically is a result of exclusion, there is potential for creating gestures that connect rather than distance, include rather than exclude. A gesturality “otherwise” that rises through call-and-response. A Black gesturality that in Tina Campt’s words ‘is a performance of a future that hasn’t yet happened but must’; one that embraces the migration of gestures and enjoys the new connections they create. This ‘performance of a future’ expands the understanding of gesturality to go far beyond Agamben’s neuroticised notion of the word. It suggests a loss of Western bourgeois gestures not only to ataxia and tics but also to other gestures, from other places and other people.

SCENE 6

Kafka’s stories are not stories at all. They rely on gesture, the bodily equivalent of words, words that suddenly shoot out of syntax and take on a life of their own.

Michael Taussig, *Walter Benjamin’s Grave*³

A gesture does not only rise in or among human bodies. A word, text or a photograph might also be a gesture – if they gesture towards a future or, as Schneider writes, if they ‘open toward interaction’.⁴ A photograph, even if it does not literally document a bodily gesture, can still be a gesture because it calls for a response, it is made to be seen, it has a future viewer always in mind. The *body-jumping performances* of a gesture operate in photographs. Gestures jump from a body (placed in front of a camera) to the surface of a film and from there to the viewer who is invited (gestured towards) a response. Many have written of this body jumping connection of the photograph. Roland Barthes hints on it in *Camera Lucida* when he writes: ‘From a real body which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately *touch* me, who am here’.⁵ This body-to-body connection, which for Barthes is centred around the connection

1 Schneider, ‘Past May Yet.’

2 Harris, *Experiments in Exile*, 2.

3 Taussig, *Walter Benjamin’s Grave*, 127.

4 Schneider, ‘In Our Hands,’ 114.

5 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 80; emphasis mine.

with an image of his mother in her youth, happens through what Barthes calls an ‘umbilical cord’ (of light travelling in air).¹ Jill Bennett suggests that images have the capacity to induce an ‘affective contagion’, they ‘touch the viewer who feels rather than simply sees the event’.² Along the same line, Schneider writes of similar qualities in gesture, writing of it as a ‘carrier of affect’ which may be ‘contagious’ among bodies.³ Gestures thus jump from body to body and carry affect as well as history. Kathleen Stewart’s notion of ‘the jump’ of affect – an even momentary ‘charge’ passing through the body – is echoed by both Bennett and Schneider.⁴

The jump of affect from the body of a photograph to the body of a viewer also conjures Roland Barthes’s notion of the *punctum*. Barthes differentiates between two actions of the photograph: *studium* and *punctum*. *Studium* is the representational function of the photograph where it is giving information to the viewer. It is what the photograph is trying to say. *Punctum*, on the other hand, goes beyond the banal informative function and initiates an involuntary affective connection. Barthes writes that a ‘photograph’s *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)’.⁵ The *punctum* does not wait to be sought out by the viewer, instead, it jumps right at them. ‘It’, writes Barthes, ‘rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me’. Like a ‘wound’, a ‘prick’, a ‘mark made by a pointed figure’, *punctum* scars the skin of the photograph and the viewer.⁶ It makes a jump similar to that of the gesture that Schneider writes of. The uncontrollability and unintentionality of the impact of *punctum* chimes with Kathleen Stewart’s description of affects as *involuntary participation*.⁷ A participation loaded with bodily metaphors to an extent that they stop being metaphors and become real bodily engagements. Words such as *contagion*, *touch* and *feel* (Bennett), *contagious* (Schneider), and *touch*, *prick*, *wound*, *bruise* and *pierce* (Barthes) all speak of an actual bodily connection between the photograph and the viewer carried by affect, light, air or Barthes’s suggested *umbilical cord*.⁸ Still I feel that Barthes – for whom all roads to and from a photograph lead to *death* – contradicts himself when he resembles the carrier of this body-to-body connection to an umbilical cord; a most intimate and vital bodily connection of mother and child that has much more to do with *life* – carrying life, sharing life – than *death*.

A photograph is a gesture that is open to and suggestive of interpretation and response. It is always offering a gesture to, in Schneider’s words, ‘be picked up and played again by another

1 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 81.

2 Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 36.

3 Schneider, ‘In Our Hands,’ 114.

4 For how the circulation of forces (the ongoing call-and-response for Schneider) creates intimate, unintended or unplanned affects in bodies, see Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 40.

5 Barthes, 27.

6 Barthes, 25-26.

7 Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 40.

8 This may be a non-human body or a body in or of a photograph.

(body or thing) in some reiterative combination of sameness and difference'.¹ Like a gesture, a photograph is itself a response to another call from a body or a thing. It is always thus resonating in a call-and-response among bodies, always alive and engaged with *what will be* rather than obsessed with *what was* and, another one of Barthes's obsessions, *'that-has-been'*.² A photograph is a gesture, laterally carrying and dispersing fragments of history in different directions through light and air. Photographs are thus carrying and making the *'past that is not past, a past that is with us still'*, around us in the air, in oxygen, in hydrogen and in light.³ The photograph is not *still*, as it is often called, if that were to mean motionless and silent. It may be 'stills of a lost film' as Agamben writes. There is something in the way Agamben pictures a still as always part of a moving image of a lost film that gives life to the still in an invitation to re-imagine the film that is lost.⁴ *Still* also suggests an ongoingness, a continuation of a state. In this latter sense, a photograph is *still* (up to this moment) a call. If, following Schneider, we do not treat a photograph 'simply as representation, trace, documentation, art, or evidence of the bygone' or as what Barthes calls an emanation of 'a thing of the past', a photograph becomes not *still* (motionless, silent, solid).⁵ And if instead, we approach a photograph as 'ongoing call' and reverberation, a place of 'departure' rather than arrival, as Philip Monk would put it, the photograph becomes fluid, changeable and suggestive of potential change.⁶ Seemingly mute photographs become objects that when attentively listened to – following on from Tina Camps's methodology – would become sites of 'cultural formation' and 'social reproduction'.⁷

SCENE 7

#dance: I'm standin[g] and shaking, it's cold and I'm fragile, I let my hair down.
I turn my back to the landmark. I ask a woman in a beige coat if I can hold her
right hand in my left hand till the traffic light changes. I apologise for my hand
being so cold. Hold someone's hand knowing you will never hold that hand
again. I murmur a poem that comes to mind.

Tara Fatehi Irani, 'Pace in a Foreign Land,'
day 342/365 of Mishandled Archive

I click next and next and next as I read the dances of Tara Fatehi Irani's Mishandled Archive

1 Schneider, 'Past May Yet,' 287.

2 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 76-77.

3 Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 62.

4 Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture,' 54.

5 Barthes, 81; and Schneider, 299.

6 Schneider, 299; Monk, *Disassembling the Archive*, sec. Sunday, September 3, 2006.

7 Camp, *Listening to Images*, 5, 8.

one by one – sometimes skipping one – on Instagram on my laptop. Some dances I recognise from a live performance I have seen months ago. “Hold someone’s hand knowing you will never hold that hand again”, she said while holding an audience member’s hand. There was a bit of chaos as everyone in the room was trying to find a hand to hold – one that they knew they would never hold again. I held the hand of a man I didn’t know. He had salt and pepper beard, not particularly groomed. We laughed before we held each other’s hands, joking that we should never see each other again. The room slowly came to a silence as she started singing a song in a language I did not know. ‘Fire...Fire’, is the only thing she said in English in the middle of the song. A little more pressure in our holding hands as the song got to its climax. We weren’t told when to stop holding hands but naturally took the performer’s letting go of the hand she was holding as a sign. I smiled, my partner smiled, the show went on.

Mishandled Archive’s “dances” – as they are called and repeatedly labelled – are gestures. They are movements of specific parts of the body that are composed in and suggestive of a call-and-response. These dances are responses to a combination of calls – calls from the photographs, the stories behind them, the site of the dance and the people present on the site. These multiple responses are made into a call as soon as they are embodied, as soon as they move the air around them; be it when they are first composed in one of the daily sites or later when they are recreated at other iterations in performance halls.

The dances are also made into a call when they are transformed into, transferred and amplified through written scores – the scores which are handwritten on the back of the photographs and circulate either as copies of the handwritten text in exhibitions and performances or in typed script on social media. The written scores become calls that initiate and anticipate response or, to echo Schneider’s words, they ‘open toward interaction’. Before the start of the performance, as we were getting drinks and waiting for the start of the show, I was approached by Tara Fatehi Irani and asked if I would do a short movement at a certain point during the show. I tentatively said, ‘ok, if it’s not too difficult’. I was given a print from an Instagram post. Handwritten signs circled what I was expected to do, the instructions were also patiently described to me. The score was something like: walk with very small steps, going forward 5cm with each step, plus an irregular twitch in the shoulder. I was also given a printed score of the whole performance with cues for when to start. I was *Dance 2*. ‘You won’t be alone, don’t worry, there will be others doing this movement with you’, I was reassured. At different intervals during the performance, some audience members from across the room started moving, following their prearranged cues in groups of four or five. Each group doing *Dance 1*, *Dance 2*, *Dance 3*, and so on. As promised, I wasn’t alone in Dance 2 and that felt much better. Together we responded to a call, together we became a call for the rest of the audience who followed our lead and copied our movement. In the final scene, everyone in the room was invited to choose a score from the many pieces hanging around us in the air and perform or read its dance.

Mishandled Archive's dance scores are not mere documents and traces of dances past, affirming that these gestures have happened, but are rather a call to a future viewer/mover/dancer to reenact these moves. In fact, if we suffice to the dance scores, they provide no solid proof that such dances *have been* (as part of the site-specific daily actions) but instead suggest that they *will be*. They *will be* in the minds and bodies of those who read them or those who, in their own personalised and altered ways, reenact them at other times and places. The reenactments which in their own way become a call and can change the past that is floating around them through suggesting yet another 'future otherwise' and yet again confirming *That the Past May Yet Have Another Future*.¹

The scores are not only a transformation of the bodily gestures into text but are also, in their abstract text form, a dance and a gesture of their own. As Maddy Costa writes in a review of a performance of Mishandled Archive in 2019, different to the one I attended, the 'spidery writing curlicued and elongated, perform[s] its own kind of dance'.² Is she referring to the spidery handwritten English or hinting at the age-old Western stereotype of spidery Arabic – or, for the sake of this conversation, Farsi – script that at times appears in the scores? Either way, in *its own kind of dance*, and its abstract *spidery* form, the writing is gesturing towards a future viewer who needs to look literally behind and beyond the photograph to find the dance.

The photographs in Mishandled Archive are, like any photograph, a gesture. Via their affective jump and bodily connections and *puncta*, they engage the viewer in a call-and-response. They also – rather inevitably considering that they are wrapped in the text of the title, location, dance and hashtags that are sometimes snippets of a story – gesture towards a narrative. A narrative further moulded by visual or social signs present in any image and doubled when a photograph is juxtaposed with a distant site. Here, two systems of communication and meaning-making, that of the image and the text, are at work. In this photo/text diptych, Martha Rosler's infamous *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* (1974-75) comes to mind. Walid Raad and the Atlas Group's *My Neck is Thinner Than a Hair* (2001) also comes to mind. Mishandled Archive specifically echoes, consciously or not, Raad's use of text as a labelling device in *My Neck is Thinner Than a Hair*. In *My Neck is Thinner Than a Hair: Engines*, Raad investigates the history of car bomb explosions during the Lebanese civil war (1975-91) by reproducing found or appropriated photographs of the only remaining part of the cars after the explosion: the engine. In his historiographic approach, each of the engine photographs, several of which also picture locals or officials examining the engine, are captioned (in handwriting) with details such as location, date and number of casualties. The title, location, temperature, dance and serial number that is meticulously recorded and

1 Schneider, 'Past May Yet,' 289, 288. Schneider describes that the title of her work 'That the Past May Yet Have Another Future' is taken from a *call* to a conference by Thomas DeFrantz and Gustavo Furtado.

2 Costa, 'Past Unknown.'

written at every Mishandled Archive piece is reminiscent of the records of crime that Raad and other forensic archives deploy.

Perhaps Mishandled Archive's forensic labelling is alluding to a crime, one that is never directly spoken of, one that I don't want to force into my reading of it. The text and the image, whether on their own or in combination, seem to be inadequate descriptive systems for talking about this unspoken crime. They only gesture towards its possibility and move on to call for new responses and alterations through the gestures of photograph/dance/text; through making new contacts between past and present.

Abiodun Tagoe is a practitioner-researcher whose work includes writing, dramaturgy, documentation and performance. She is interested in cross-cultural studies in performance, participatory art and alternative forms of performance documentation. Her work has been published in several journals and shown at several site-specific locations and art institutions across the UK and Nigeria. She works as a dramaturg with Ruidoso Teatro (Colombia) and Kaleidoksop (UK) among others.



The Understated Adventures of Miguel De Palomares and other Short Stories

What follows are fragments of pages and inserts that could not be fully retrieved from the memoirs of the Arsonist. The first is a letter that was found amongst the pages of the memoirs, folded into four parts. It seems to have been written to the Arsonist by Martin Luther, the German Protestant reformist, prior to his public burning of the papal bull *Exurge Domine* as well as other Catholic books in Wittenberg.¹ The others are from the Arsonist's explorations around the globe.

Dearest,
Tomorrow is the big day.
Today is day-off—potatoes and Bratapfel. We
will respond to fire with fire. When they burn
all our books, we burn all their books. And let's
not lose hope—I foresee that both people will
start writing mad long volumes to replace the
old ones. They will fill the libraries and need
more libraries and even more. See you at Elster
Gate. Bring all the fuel you know of.
Sincerely,
Martin
December 9, 1520
Wittenberg

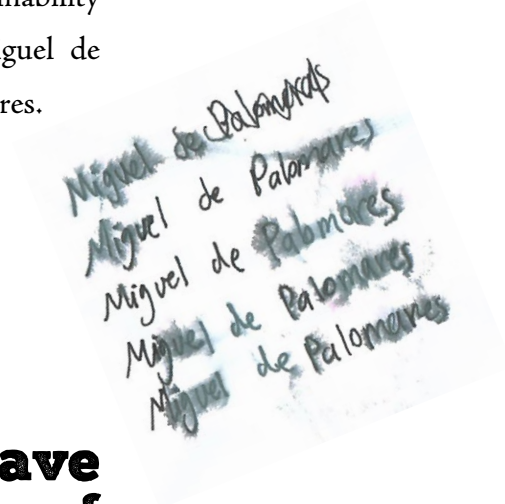
1 Becking, Cannegieter, Poll and Metter, *From Babylon to Eternity*, 91.



The Arsonist

1539 - Atlantic Ocean

Sailing to what my crew call “the new world”, with a Spanish crew of builders, farmers and other priests. I suspect this mission will take me a few centuries and my name, Miguel de Palomares [I should repeat it to myself again and again so I won’t forget], will be carved in history. But at the moment I am more concerned with the sea sickness and my inability to even stand on my feet without vomiting. Miguel de Palomares. Miguel de Palomares. Miguel de Palomares.



Wednesday 13 April 2016

Discovery of priest's grave sheds light on first days of Spanish conquest of Mexico¹

¹ Associated Press in Mexico City, ‘Priest’s Grave.’

Fire in the old palace of Tre Kronor (Three Crowns) in 1697 destroyed two thirds of the archives, including the registers of 1522 to 1648.¹

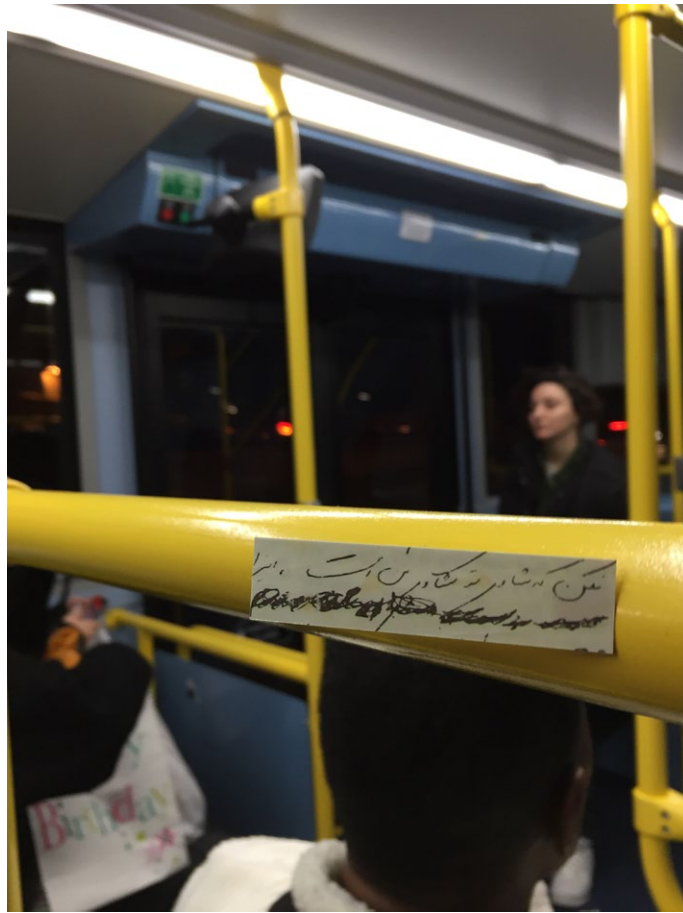
April 1697 – Stockholm

Started a new job at Tre Kronor. The whole castle is wood and copper. Should be easy. Have already made friends with one of the part time fire watchmen. His name is Anders. I think he fancies me. Last night he—————

1 Sherriff, 'Sweden,' 265.

YZ

The rest of this section was destroyed in the lab due to the internal flame of the notebook.



**... don't, that your joy
is my joy
... don't, that your joy
is my joy
... don't, that your joy
is my joy**

Anahid Ravanpoor

On Repetition

Walter Benjamin writes that ‘storytelling is always the art of repeating stories’.¹ The more the story becomes ingrained in the memory of the listener and the more space it takes up in their memory, the more likely they are to repeat that story to others someday. The story of Shahrzād, Dīnāzād and their efforts to tame the king is the most repeated story of *The Thousand Nights and One Night*. I mentioned earlier that every night as the night turns to day and Shahrzād stops her story, a few lines are repeated word for word:

But morning overtook Shahrazad, and she lapsed into silence. Then Dinarzad said to her sister Shahrazad, “O sister, what a strange and entertaining story!” Shahrazad replied, “What is this compared with what I shall tell you tomorrow night if the king spares me and lets me live! It will be even stranger”.²

Through this repetition the book becomes primarily a book about the women’s way of resisting through ‘entertaining’ storytelling. These lines show the significance of everyday repetition and endurance in the story but are negligently omitted from some translations.³ The translations that remove the repetitions simply because they are repeated in the exact same words have no grasp of the crux of the whole book.

Shahrzād’s ongoing daily performance is an artistic methodology that has been deployed and adapted by writers, artists and filmmakers for thousands of years. Her methodology is to do

1 Benjamin, ‘The Storyteller,’ 90.

2 Mahdi and Haddawy, *The Arabian Nights*.

3 See Lane’s translation where on the second night, Lane admits: ‘As this is expressed in the original work in nearly the same words at the close of every night, such repetitions will in the present translation be omitted’ (Lane, *Arabian Nights Entertainment*, 22).

something again and again and again. Rather than radical change, she proposes a continuous series of ongoing changes, a slow revolution rather than a violent rupture, a revolution without death, anxiety, trauma, violence and PTSD. She achieves the results of a revolution, same as that of Kaveh and Fereydoun against Zahhak, but she does this through a durational daily performance.¹ Artists and writers who create work using a daily form of repetition are invoking, consciously or unconsciously, the methodology and process put forth by Shahrzād.

YZ

Several artists and writers have used a formal structure of daily repetitions in their practice. Without naming any artists, Ravanpoor suggests that they are all, knowingly or not, invoking Shahrzād's methodology. A few examples are Suzan-Lori Parks' *365 Days/365 Plays* (2002-2003), Nicole Garneau's *HEAT :05* (2005) and Tim Etchells' *Vacuum Days* (2011). One work that I would single out here for its intentional use of Shahrzād's methodology is Barbara Campbell's *1001 nights cast* (2005-2008).

In this durational web-based project, the Australian artist performed and livestreamed a story for a thousand and one nights between 2005 and 2008. Each story was a writer's response to a prompt by Campbell which she had found in that day's newspaper stories about events in the Middle East. Every day she would draw the prompt she wanted to give to the writers in watercolour and post it on the project website. And at sunset, she would perform the story, which was a maximum of a thousand and one words, to unknown online audiences.

The project website, which has been the hub of all the

1 See Gauch, *Liberating Shahrzād*, xviii.

activities of the project during its making in 2005-2008 and now holds its archive, writes:

1001 nights cast is a project generated by the forces of The 1001 nights: the theatrics of the voiced story, the need for framing devices, the strategies for survival, the allure of the Middle East and its contrasting realities.¹

Each one of the above points reaffirms Campbell's continuation of Shahrzād's methodology. Campbell chooses the evening (sunset) as her performance time, further confirming her stories as belonging to the realm of evening and night. Like Shahrzād's stories her stories are also about outcasts and marginalised voices of her time – those in the Middle East. Even though Campbell collects her prompts from the media, not from people, she manages to personalise these by asking many different writers to write new stories based on the prompts. Aside from a few exceptions, the writers are mostly European, Australian or North American. A choice that while reflects the nature of *The Thousand Nights and One Night* as a transnational work that bounces back and forth between the East and the West, also suggests that voices from the Middle East need a catalyst of Western media and writers in order to be 'cast'. Therefore their own voices will hardly ever be heard – at least through this project.

1 Campbell, Barbara, 'About the Project,' accessed May 10, 2019. <https://1001.net.au/about/>



**Amongst The Books
We Will Proudly
Burn**

In *Lexicon for an Affective Archive*, Giulia Palladini expands on Derrida's *mal d'archive* by suggesting, instead, a *jouissance d'archive*. She finds this *jouissance* in the final scene of Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451*, specifically in the grandson of one of the *book-people* who is trying to memorise and embody his grandfather (the grandfather is the embodiment of *Weir of Hermiston* by Robert Louis Stevenson). This joy (*jouissance*), Palladini writes, can 'mobilise other forms of renewal, impressing other forms of attachment on the unlimited surface of the future'.¹ Palladini describes *jouissance d'archive* as 'an act of choice and courage' participating in an encounter 'with the forms of appearance and metamorphosis that constantly shape and transform our own idea of archiving'. This courageous encounter with the archive, or the 'certain habitat of memory' as Palladini calls it, is the mission of the Arsonist and of Mishandled Archive.² A mission that may be incomplete but is sure to suggest a transformation of our understanding of and approach to archiving and archives. A sparkle of this joy can be the first spark of the fire that burns the archive and in this burning turns it into multiple *affective archives*, carried in the bodies of those who by chance happen to embody it. No single body would be the full embodiment of the archive. It is the multiplicity that mobilises new potentials and 'other forms of renewal'. This affective future rejects the accepted norms of objective value in the archive. This joy rejects, and even ridicules, the significance given to the domiciliation of the archive.

For Palladini, 'an affective archive is both the deposit, the habitat, and the means of production of historical potentiality'.³ This *historical potentiality* seems to be a notion that both the Arsonist and Fatehi Irani

1 Palladini and Pustianaz, *Lexicon*, 18.

2 Palladini and Pustianaz, 19.

3 Palladini and Pustianaz, 17.

are experimenting with. Destruction – performative destruction – is the force that impregnates the concept of the archive with this potentiality – after the object and the place of the archive have turned into ash, fragments and ruins.

The Arsonist

1943 – Tehran – Iran

Several thinkers, writers, activists and people who are hungry for change have joined my party. The party is called *Baahamad-e Azadegan* (the Party of the Free). I currently go by the name Ahmad Kasravi, the leader of the party. I feel more energised than ever. People have responded really well to my theory of *Pak Dini* (Pure Faith). They call me a social thinker, a religion reformist, a historian and linguist, and I truly am all of those. I am advocating a modern rational Islam at the moment; an Islam that does not come with the baggage of new sects, imams, and irrational and superstitious claims. Pak Dini supports the people, the environment, health, hygiene and mandatory education. We will protect the constitution and educate people about their rights. We oppose Eurocentrism and support domestic social and economic development.¹



1 Vaezpoor, 'Tarikhcheye Bahamad-e Azadegan,' 42.

5/12/12
12.12

Notes for the speech on Friday. Add emphasis on all underlined words.

We despise any literature that holds us back from improving, that ties us to useless traditions. Any trace of these in a book and it deserves to be put into your heaters at home. I have written extensively in my article '1st of Dey and Its Story' about our revulsion of books that spread myths and superstitions.¹ I emphasise the need to burn these books as a key to the Iranian nation's financial and social salvation and as a lesson for those who deem such nonsense of any value.²

Amongst the books we will proudly burn are books that people call highlights of Persian literature. These are poems by Hafez, or the Boostan and Golestan by Saadi and the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. We burn these alongside books on Shiism, Sufism and Bahatism, all of which I find misleading and harmful for the masses. I would also like to encourage all of our learned young people to destroy poems and

1 The English translation of the article is '23rd of December and its Story'.

2 Kasravi, 'Yekom-e Deymah.'

novels that they have written themselves. Never immobilise yourself by getting too attached to your own writing.¹

Here I have a list that I received of 'hundred and eighty-eight harmful books' that your brothers and sisters have 'burnt or thrown into the Karoon river' in Ahvaz.² The ceremonies in Ahvaz were 'the most glorious of all places.' And I hope to see this ceremony every 23rd of December.

'With God's will, we want to overthrow the roots of those mal-educations and it is for this reason that we endeavour to destroy the books. Whatever we find, we burn. And I shall say this again: we do this by the will of God.'³ People complain to me, 'But you are burning books!!'. 'Yes', I say, 'we are burning books, but which books?''⁴ If bad things happen to us it is because we are not trying hard enough to bring change, because we have let rotten education affect our lives and destinies. Let us stand together and

1 Kasravi, 'Yekom-e Deymah.' 4-6.

2 Kasravi, 7. (All translations of Kasravi, 'Yekom-e Deymah' are my own)

3 Kasravi, 2.

4 Kasravi, 6.

fight for a better future.

I know this is a symbolic effort and some people laugh at me. But isn't all literature and art a symbolic effort anyway? Realistically speaking, in this day and age it is hard to truly eradicate anything – there are thousands of copies of each of these books (such waste of paper). But what I wish to experiment on with this group, *Bahamd-e Azadegan*, is the will to burn and the participation in the act of burning. The collective power to reject the weight of a poisonous past. I invite the youth to burn their writing not because it's terrible writing – well often they are really awful sentimental stuff – but because the act of burning something so precious to oneself helps us to move on, to rebuild and to renew, and to gain faith in a future that can be, and will be, better than the past.

I am thinking about how this performative act of destruction relates to actual destruction but right now I have to revise tomorrow's talk.

1946 – Of course someone will try to kill me. They think I'm a threat to Islam. They say I have burnt the Qor'an.¹ I deny this senseless allegation. I will survive the first assault. The attacker, a young mullah known as Navvab, will be

1 Kasravi, 'Yekom-e Deymah,' 3.

jailed for a short while and released only to plan another assassination carried out by his crew. This time: a memorable death. One bullet and twenty-seven knife wounds.¹ Or was it twenty-five? Difficult to count on the spot. There were quite a few attackers. Those who were arrested pleaded not guilty on account of self-defence. They were freed.² I have learnt not to be shocked.

1980s – Still not shocked but they've named a street in Tehran after the plotter of my murder: Navvab Street.

2000s – And still not shocked but the street has now turned into an expressway and they've built masses of council houses just off the expressway under the same name. Not that I care, but apartment blocks on the edge of an expressway??? Fantastic view though.

The destruction will bring change - just as I have been advocating for years. Similar to the moment leading in 1970, Baldessari's fire is also a performative one. It's more a vessel for making a point - or wave of powerful literature.

1970
John Baldessari (artist)
has burned all his paintings from the past thirteen years. Taken them all to a mosque to be put to fire. He's going to make a name for himself with this one - trust me, I know. He seems to have images of most of the paintings on slide so they're not gone gone - if you know what I mean. Rumour has it that he has totally destroyed his oeuvre but truth is, he has transformed part of his oeuvre. A transformation which will lead him to make other forms of art and be freed from the limits of painting.

Mundy, 'Lost Art'

1 Milani, 'Shahid-e Iran-e Modern.'

2 Amini, 'Kasravi'.



Sisters, Swollen, Touch, Travel: Lessons in Web-Archaeography



Wang Shu, Chen

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{~/Checkpoint 10.03.14}
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{go// GSP-pool-LT9 environment}
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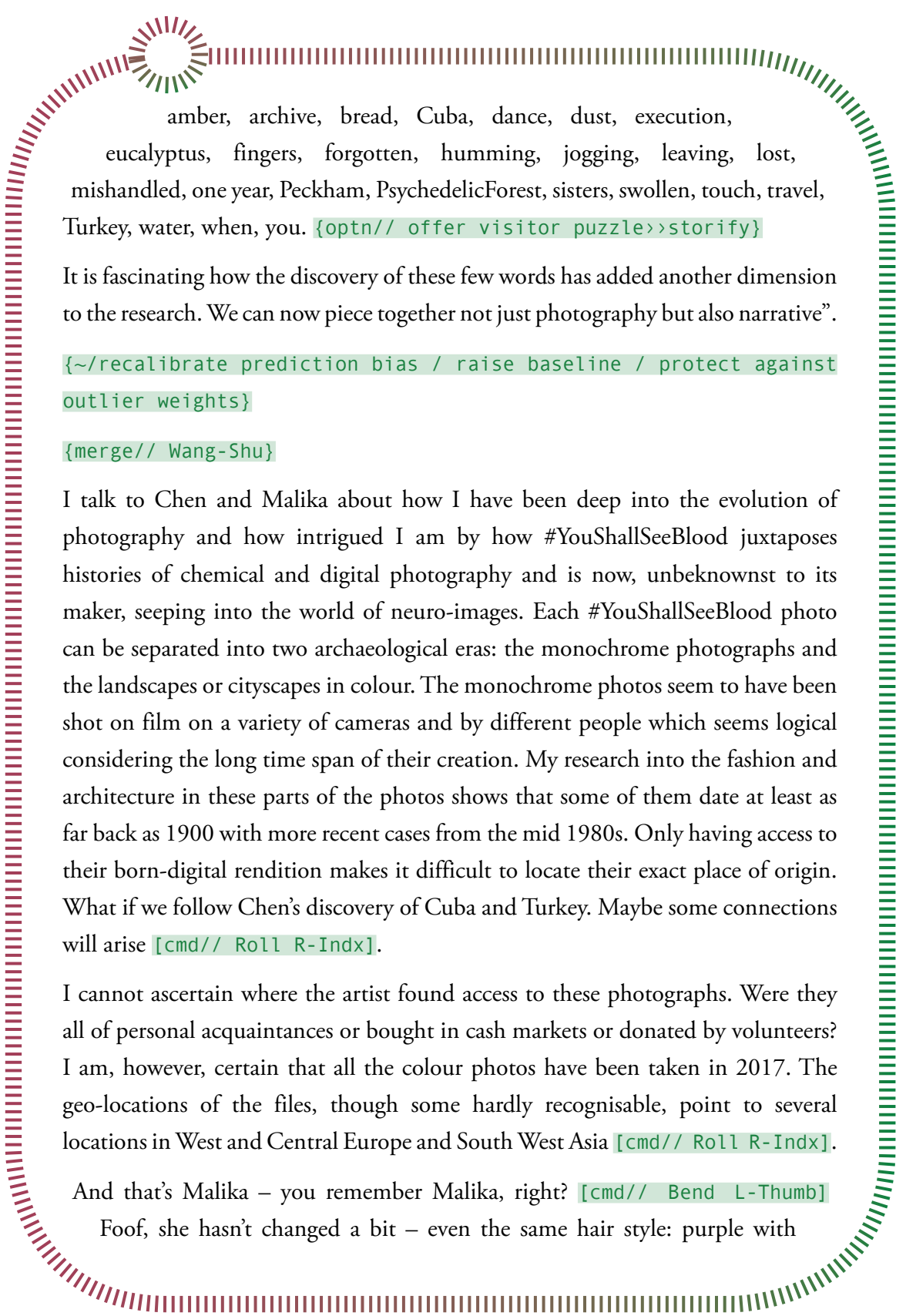
2109 – GSN summer party. Who doesn't like a dip? Perfect weather in the shadow [cmd// L-Palm on skull] and perfect drinks. Can I offer you something? {optn// offer visitor conversation} [cmd// L-Palm forward] I run into my old colleagues Chen and Malika and discover that all these years both of them have obsessively continued working on #YouShallSeeBlood in their free time. Somehow, none of us had considered talking to the others because ... well ... you know how it's difficult to talk these days. It turns out that Chen has discovered remnants of an e-book, an early electronic publication [cmd// Roll R-Idx], which is mostly or even solely dedicated to #YouShallSeeBlood [cmd// Bend L-Thumb]. She has found similar data traces in our found photos and the e-book:

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{merge// Chen} [cmd// Bend L-Thumb]
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“The e-book remnants are fascinating. What we have left is as if the original e-book was a clay vase that was smashed into pieces and all its fragments were placed into a single bag. This bag of randomly mixed words is what we now have. Unfortunately, we have no trace of the feature vector that could help us index these words so most of the data is undecipherable with current technology. I am, however, developing a new AML (Ancient Machine Language) with the hope of decoding “the bag” [cmd// Roll R-Idx]. If you want I can show you how the AML uses a non-binary regression model to propagate the gaps in ancient language [cmd// Roll R-Idx]. I have been dealing with numerous crash blossoms where phrases are ambiguous and can have at least two meanings but I am positive that we can alleviate the crash effects with the AML I am developing.

So far I have been able to extract some words from the #YouShallSeeBlood datamass.

It's a very exciting curve in reverse encoding. These are some of the words I have been able to put together from amongst the ruins:



amber, archive, bread, Cuba, dance, dust, execution,
eucalyptus, fingers, forgotten, humming, jogging, leaving, lost,
mishandled, one year, Peckham, PsychedelicForest, sisters, swollen, touch, travel,
Turkey, water, when, you. {optn// offer visitor puzzle>>storify}

It is fascinating how the discovery of these few words has added another dimension to the research. We can now piece together not just photography but also narrative”.

{~/recalibrate prediction bias / raise baseline / protect against
outlier weights}

{merge// Wang-Shu}

I talk to Chen and Malika about how I have been deep into the evolution of photography and how intrigued I am by how #YouShallSeeBlood juxtaposes histories of chemical and digital photography and is now, unbeknownst to its maker, seeping into the world of neuro-images. Each #YouShallSeeBlood photo can be separated into two archaeological eras: the monochrome photographs and the landscapes or cityscapes in colour. The monochrome photos seem to have been shot on film on a variety of cameras and by different people which seems logical considering the long time span of their creation. My research into the fashion and architecture in these parts of the photos shows that some of them date at least as far back as 1900 with more recent cases from the mid 1980s. Only having access to their born-digital rendition makes it difficult to locate their exact place of origin. What if we follow Chen’s discovery of Cuba and Turkey. Maybe some connections will arise [cmd// Roll R-Idx].

I cannot ascertain where the artist found access to these photographs. Were they all of personal acquaintances or bought in cash markets or donated by volunteers? I am, however, certain that all the colour photos have been taken in 2017. The geo-locations of the files, though some hardly recognisable, point to several locations in West and Central Europe and South West Asia [cmd// Roll R-Idx].

And that’s Malika – you remember Malika, right? [cmd// Bend L-Thumb]

Foof, she hasn’t changed a bit – even the same hair style: purple with



yellow tips—————Okaaaaay ... She is either too high or genuinely motivated to develop #YouShallSeeBlood and “take it to places” as she keeps repeating: “take it to places”. Can I offer you some fruit? [cmd// L-Palm forward] Malika has a perfectly planned proposal for an exhibition where all the works are based on the digital debris we have discovered. From her own abiotic archaeology to my research on photography and Chen’s fragmented narratives, the proposal brings everything together.

{~/Checkpoint 10.03.15}


{go// ceremony-0C6 environment}

Six months after that coincidental meeting we are planning the exhibition, *#YouShallSeeBlood: Centenary of the Unforgotten*. We have a team of people who are writing open calls, invitations, commissions, you name it. I even noticed myself preparing a speech for when I am going to accept a dunnowhat award for outstanding contribution to the field of web-archaeography at the exhibition:

“Photographic remains on the web are all around us,” I say to the crowd, “like the dust that rises from the archaeological remains of Rome and Persepolis and lingers in the air to this date till we swallow it as we walk. They may be inaccessible for a while, like the un/lost photos of Instagram, but they are unforgotten and at some point they will be found – even if in fragments and under layers of code”. Then I get stuck in whether it’s ok to use “swallow” for the dust in the air or I should change it to “breathe in”. Only then, I notice that the field of web-archaeography doesn’t even exist. But I can tell you what it is.

Remember Michael Shanks and Connie Svabo?

{merge// Michael-Shanks/Connie-Svabo} In 2013, they suggested a hybrid field at the intersection of archaeology and photography: ‘archaeography’, a term that comes from the shared ontology and structures of photography and archaeology while embracing both ‘*ta archaia*, old things, and *graphe*, their inscription,



record, documentation' {optn// ref.1}. They were not only interested in archaeology's intersection with chemical photography. They were among the first archaeologists to also study photographs on the web. {~/focus switch} "Digital photography turned the web into 'a vast archaeological archive that begs acts of reconnection' {optn// ref.2}." Although they never put these two fields together to create another hybrid field of web-archaeography, I suggest it is time we take the photographic debris in our digital wastelands seriously [cmd// Roll R-Indx].

For nearly a hundred years, the web archive has grown and grown and algorithms have been written over, around and in-between existing algorithms. Same as in site-based archaeology where civilisations are discovered to be built on top of and around the ruins of older civilisations [cmd// Pump L-Cheek], websites were built and updated over and inside the gaps of existing ones [cmd// Pump L-Cheek], concealing many photographic and narrative relics under layers of new text and imageries. #YouShallSeeBlood is therefore a web-archaeographical project because it entangles an archaeological imagination with fragments of web-based photographic relics.

I don't wish to suggest that photographs are solely *documentations* (graphe) of *old things* (ta archaia). They cannot be only passive inscriptions. They are active agents of re-creation. Photographs that were placed on the web did not end in the past. They were specifically placed there with a view to a future web-archaeographer who will discover these corrupted fragments and piece them together to create narratives that remain forever conjectural. Hmmm ... I should use parts of this in my speech. Care for another drink? [cmd// L-Palm forward]

{~/recalibrate selection bias}

1 Shanks and Svabo, 'Archaeology and Photography,' 3.

2 Shanks and Svabo, 'Archaeology and Photography,' 11.



Be Zaban-e Bizabani

Anahid Ravanpoor

On Translation and Transformation

In *Liberating Shahrzād: Feminism, Postcolonialism, and Islam*, Suzanne Gauch studies the works of Arab and Muslim women filmmakers for whom Shahrzād is a role model and a trope for reclaiming their identity. Trying to subvert the Western idea of Arab Muslim women as silent, victim, exotic and oppressed, these women look up to Shahrzād and her creative strategies. For Gauch and the artists she is studying, Shahrzād is an exemplary Arab Muslim woman whose historical agency liberates modern Arab Muslim women from the political violence they face at home as well as the false identity imposed on them by the West.

Unaware of the recurring incarnations of Shahrzād in Iran and Iranian literature and oblivious to the role of Dīnāzād, Gauch writes: ‘Given the Persian overtones of Shahrzād’s name, her tale surely had its origin somewhere in the Islamic world of the Middle Ages’.¹ To say that Shahrzād (Shahrazad, Scheherazade, Shahrazade, ...) has Persian overtones is like saying “Wolfgang has German overtones”, rather than, “Wolfgang is a German name, made up of *wolf* (wolf) plus *gang* (path)”. Shahrzād is a Persian name widely used to this day in Iran. The same goes for Shahriar which is another highly popular Farsi name. In most translations of *The Thousand Nights and One Night*, Shahriar is introduced as a Sasanian king – the Sasanians being the last ruling dynasty of Iran before the advent of Islam. Dīnāzād (Dinarzad) is also, as previously discussed, a Persian name.² One would hope that Gauch has read about the history of the names, if not in etymological detail, at least in the sporadic mentions of Fatima Mernissi whom she repeatedly cites in her book.³ I also

1 Gauch, *Liberating Shahrzād*, 2.

2 See the frame story in translations in Galland, *Les Mille et Une Nuits*, 1; Burton, *Thousand Nights and a Night*, 1:31; and Mahdi and Haddawy, *The Arabian Nights*, 5.

3 Mernissi, *Scheherazade Goes West*, 73-74.

wonder how these Persian “overtones” affirm that Shahrzād is from the Islamic world of the Middle Ages since anyone with some knowledge of world history would know that Persia (Iran) did not start in the Middle Ages nor with Islam.

After the Islamic conquest of Iran (around 650 CE), Arabic language gained more weight and became the dominant language in the region. Not only was it the language of religion but it also became the language of ‘politics, administration, business, army, official writings and sciences and daily life; it was also a fashionable language and necessary for socialising with the victors’.¹ At the time, the best way for any literature to survive the changing times was to conform to the rules of the Arab Muslim victors, their language and their culture. It was better for any book to survive under a new name and in another language than to be disregarded or destroyed.

The Arabic translations of *A Thousand Tales* gradually transposed the people, times and places of the stories into ones that would reflect the new era. The Sasanian kings mentioned in the pre-Islamic stories, themselves reiterations of more ancient kings and deities, gradually turned into the new caliphs. Worshipping fire was deprecated and superseded by worshipping Allah. Stories were added and removed, shortened and lengthened. Considering the limited amount of Persian literature that has survived from before the reign of Islam, the fact that Shahrzād has managed to survive to this day is another magic of hers.² Once again, she guises herself into a role and a performance, this time becoming a Muslim Arab woman of the medieval times, in order to survive a new era.³

1 Beyzaei, *Hezar Afsan Kojast?*, 42.

2 The scarcity of literature from before Islam is due to a combination of war, religious fanaticism, censorship and change of language and script.

3 Beyzaei suggests a later post-Islamic personification of the two women in Shia traditions of Iran as Zeinab and Shahrbanoo, the sister and wife of Imam Hossein. Stories of Zeinab and Shahrbanoo has close links to Anāhitā (goddess of the waters), Espandāramz (goddess of the earth), incarceration of women and a repetition of an emancipatory action (Beyzaei, 286-298).

This transformation and translation between languages and cultures not only did not destroy *A Thousand Tales* and Shahrzād but in fact placed translation and endless transfigurations at the heart of their processes as adaptable cross-cultural models of change. The flexibility of a creative method that can live on and function regardless of the names of people, places, dynasties and dates is a quality that has been recurrently affirmed throughout the history of the retellings of *A Thousand Tales*.¹ The material disappearance of a book or even a library therefore does not mean they disappear into nothing.

That Shahrzād, the itinerant storyteller of ancient Iran, survives into our current times strong enough to become, in Gauch's words, a 'powerful literary ancestor'² for Arab Muslim women – the identity Shahrzād is performing for centuries – only confirms her infinite ability in offering agency to marginalised voices and slowly shifting the misinterpretations of them – whether they be the Persian women who Shahriar generalises as wicked and mischievous or the Arab Muslim women whose agency is underestimated by imperialists or Islamophobes.

YZ

Earlier in the lecture, Ravanpoor uses some terminologies and concepts from Nishnaabeg scholarship. She assimilates Shahrzād's strategic resistance to that of the Nishnaabeg through the writings of Leanne Simpson (see page 166). Ravanpoor views Shahriar's brutality as a form of colonisation and Shahrzād's storytelling a native resistance. This she connects to *Biskaabiiyang*, a resistance against being colonised through a new emergence of past values, dances, songs and stories.

Ravanpoor's bringing together of these two distant native resistances opens new spaces of thinking particularly

1 Also see Borges, 'Thousand and One Nights,' 46–47.

2 Gauch, *Liberating Shahrazad*, 5.

around *The Thousand Nights and One Night*, however, she does not investigate an important Nishnaabeg concept which works in opposition to *Biskaabiiyang* and happens when a person succumbs to colonisation. According to Simpson, *Zhaaganashiiyaadizi* is ‘the process and description of living as a colonized or assimilated person’ and happens when a person lives their life as a non-Native:¹

When we speak broadly about Indigenous resistance, we are essentially speaking about processes we engage in to prevent *Zhaaganashiiyaadizi* (our people from becoming colonized or assimilated).²

Here, I would question the translation and multi-guise approach that Shahrzād takes for survival in relation to *Zhaaganashiiyaadizi* and the process of being assimilated. Is Shahrzād’s change of language, replacement of old places with new places, old kings with new caliphs and old beliefs with new religions, an acceptance of living as a non-native? Is this not a form of *Zhaaganashiiyaadizi*? Or can we make a case for translation being part of the resistance; a strategy that keeps alive *parts* of the culture – namely that of storytelling, feminine resistance and insistent creation based on the past – at the expense of other parts (names, places, people and ultimately language). In this case, Shahrzād and her night stories are collaborating with the day stories such as Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh*. The *Shahnameh*, with its stories of kings and heroes, is known for being the largest written volume that revived Farsi language after the dominance of Arabic – a mission that Shahrzād and Dīnāzād failed to fulfil. At the same time, Ferdowsi fails to, or does not attempt to, retain those parts of the culture that Shahrzād and Dīnāzād are promoting. It is as if to complete the task of cultural resistance, the day and night stories need to work together after all.

1 Simpson, *Dancing*, chap. Gdi-nweninaa.

2 Simpson, chap. Gdi-nweninaa.



The Ongoing Saga of Dead River

The little accident will compel a response.
It will shift people's life trajectories in some
small way, change them by literally changing
their course for a minute or a day.

Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*¹

On July 26, 2017, on a short visit to London, Clotilde Pons spotted Tara Fatehi Irani making one of the daily pieces at St Pancras station. They had a conversation with each other about the project and about the people in that day's photo. The photograph Fatehi Irani chose for that day seems to have been taken by the Zayande-rood ("fertile river" or "lively river") in Isfahan. The river which has given Isfahan, once the capital city of Iran, greenery and liveliness in the middle of the desert, started to dry up in 2009; initially only seasonally and then continually – mostly due to man-made causes. There has been ongoing debates, efforts, failures and successes in bringing water back to Zayande-rood.

The river is featured on another Mishandled Archive piece, 'There Was a River', day 47.

The following text is Pons's concise reflection on the encounter at St. Pancras station.

1 Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 12.

Clotilde Pons

London, day 3.

It was sunny but a bit chilly for July – like 18 degrees outside. Met Élodie and Louis in the morning for breakfast – full English!! Elodie took me to the British Museum. It was beautiful but after a while you get tired of walking, stopping, looking, walking, stopping, looking. We probably saw one sixth of it and left. It's funny, I've never been to the Louvre but now I've been to the British Museum.

We had lunch at a café. I don't remember the name but it had lots of flower baskets hanging in the front. Then I went to St Pancras station to meet Ines. While I was waiting for Ines – she was late – I saw a woman behind the column taking photos of something on the wall. We shared a moment together. I told her I'm curious about what she's doing. She took a small paper off the column and gave it to me.

It was an old black and white photo of two women's legs. She said they were by a river in Isfahan which hardly has any water these days. Poor water management, illegal wells sucking out the water, animals dying, plants dying. She said it's all sand now. She said she leaves these family photos for other people to take, she takes pictures and does some other stuff. She showed me some photos on her phone. I loved them. Ines arrived. I told her that this woman travels around the world with old photographs and leaves them on the walls. I told her about the sand river too. We went to Ines's place. Trains were busy and muggy. We had red wine and chatted till two in the morning. I slept on the sofa till now.



Heated Stories from a Long Lasting Fever



Wang Shu, Malika

```
{~/Checkpoint 10.03.16}
```

```
{~/go// Malika-bunker-GB0 environment}
```

```
{~/rapid temperature change} [cmd// L-Palm on skull]
```

I mentioned my colleague Malika had also been doing an abiotic archaeological research into #YouShallSeeBlood. For a long time we could not figure out what a pattern of tags that we had spotted in the remnants were telling us – but finally Malika managed to crack it:

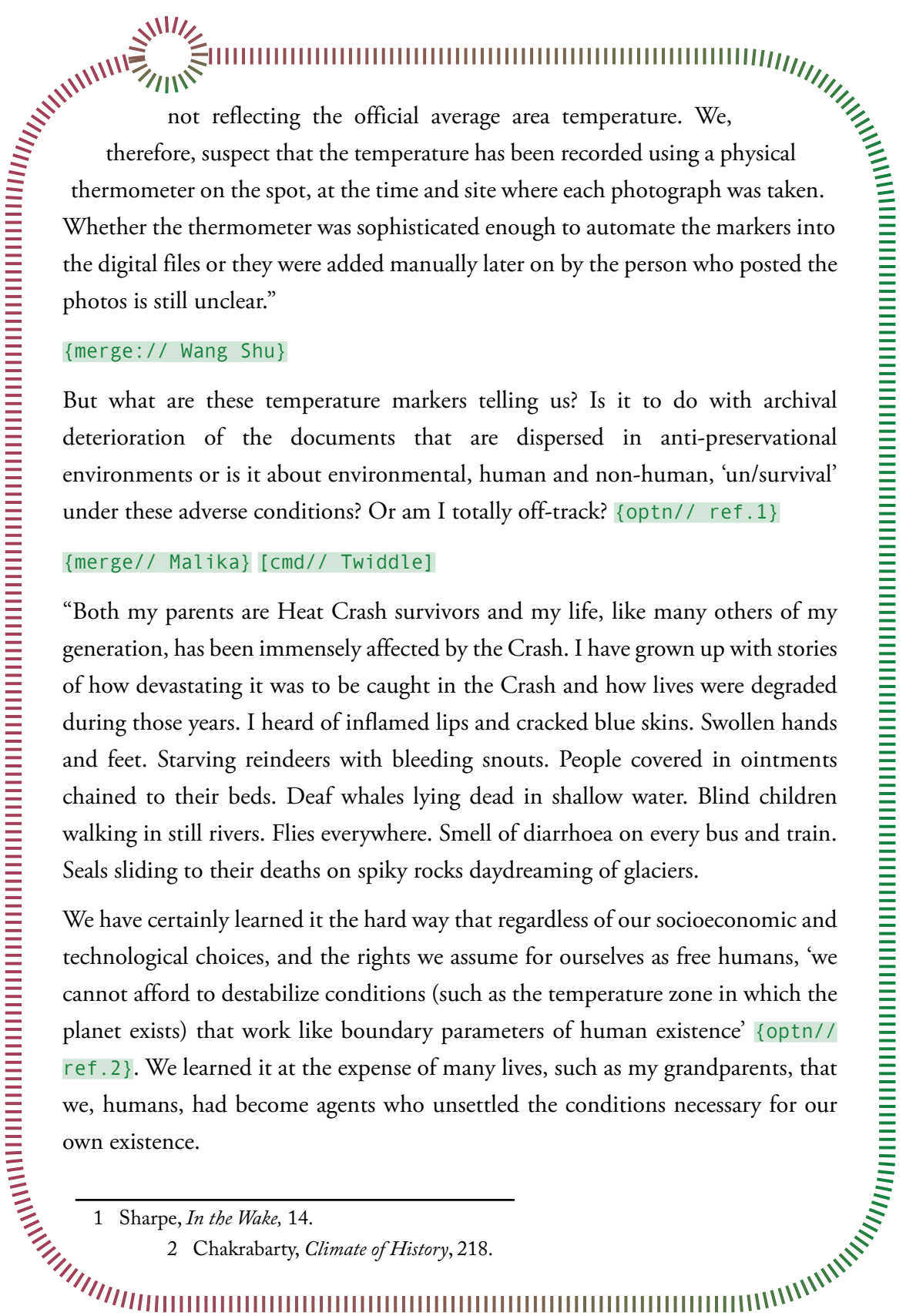
```
{merge// Malika}
```

“I remember it was our second round of re-composing the codes when I noticed a strangely repeated number pattern in all the samples. For a while this was a big mystery. I experimented with several different formulas to get to the core of what this pattern reflects. Eventually, through a coincidental chat with a climate historian friend of mine, we speculated that these tags could be temperature markers. We tested the pattern against the tamed range of values in MK strings [cmd// Roll R-Indx] following this model:

```
species = mk.Variable(38, mk.int12)
capital = mk.Variable(70, mk.float65>85)
temperature = mk.Variable(27, mk.int49)
precision = mk.Variable(0.798629839863, mk.float94)
```

```
[cmd// Roll R-Indx]
```

And it became evident that the numbers were in fact temperature markers [cmd// Roll R-Indx]. Each image is accompanied by a temperature marker which we believe records the temperature of the environment where each photograph was taken. In other words, they record the air temperature. These markers do not correspond to the official world recorded temperatures of 2017, suggesting that some of the temperatures have been recorded indoors therefore



not reflecting the official average area temperature. We, therefore, suspect that the temperature has been recorded using a physical thermometer on the spot, at the time and site where each photograph was taken. Whether the thermometer was sophisticated enough to automate the markers into the digital files or they were added manually later on by the person who posted the photos is still unclear.”

`{merge:// Wang Shu}`

But what are these temperature markers telling us? Is it to do with archival deterioration of the documents that are dispersed in anti-preservational environments or is it about environmental, human and non-human, ‘un/survival’ under these adverse conditions? Or am I totally off-track? `{optn// ref.1}`

`{merge// Malika} [cmd// Twiddle]`

“Both my parents are Heat Crash survivors and my life, like many others of my generation, has been immensely affected by the Crash. I have grown up with stories of how devastating it was to be caught in the Crash and how lives were degraded during those years. I heard of inflamed lips and cracked blue skins. Swollen hands and feet. Starving reindeers with bleeding snouts. People covered in ointments chained to their beds. Deaf whales lying dead in shallow water. Blind children walking in still rivers. Flies everywhere. Smell of diarrhoea on every bus and train. Seals sliding to their deaths on spiky rocks daydreaming of glaciers.

We have certainly learned it the hard way that regardless of our socioeconomic and technological choices, and the rights we assume for ourselves as free humans, ‘we cannot afford to destabilize conditions (such as the temperature zone in which the planet exists) that work like boundary parameters of human existence’ `{optn// ref.2}`. We learned it at the expense of many lives, such as my grandparents, that we, humans, had become agents who unsettled the conditions necessary for our own existence.

1 Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 14.

2 Chakrabarty, *Climate of History*, 218.



I am telling you my story because I saw you are curious and

`{optn// I know you have suffered as well / I know you care`

`/ I felt you have questions}`. And also because I am curious. I am curious about what happens to the stories of people whose physical existence was eradicated in the heat, not only in the Crash but before and after that as well. What happens to the stories of bodies that are left to decay in melting sun or freezing gusts? Who believes the tales that talk about snowy winters? Where do our stories go in flooded houses or in the harbours that are no more? `{optn// install compassion0.7`

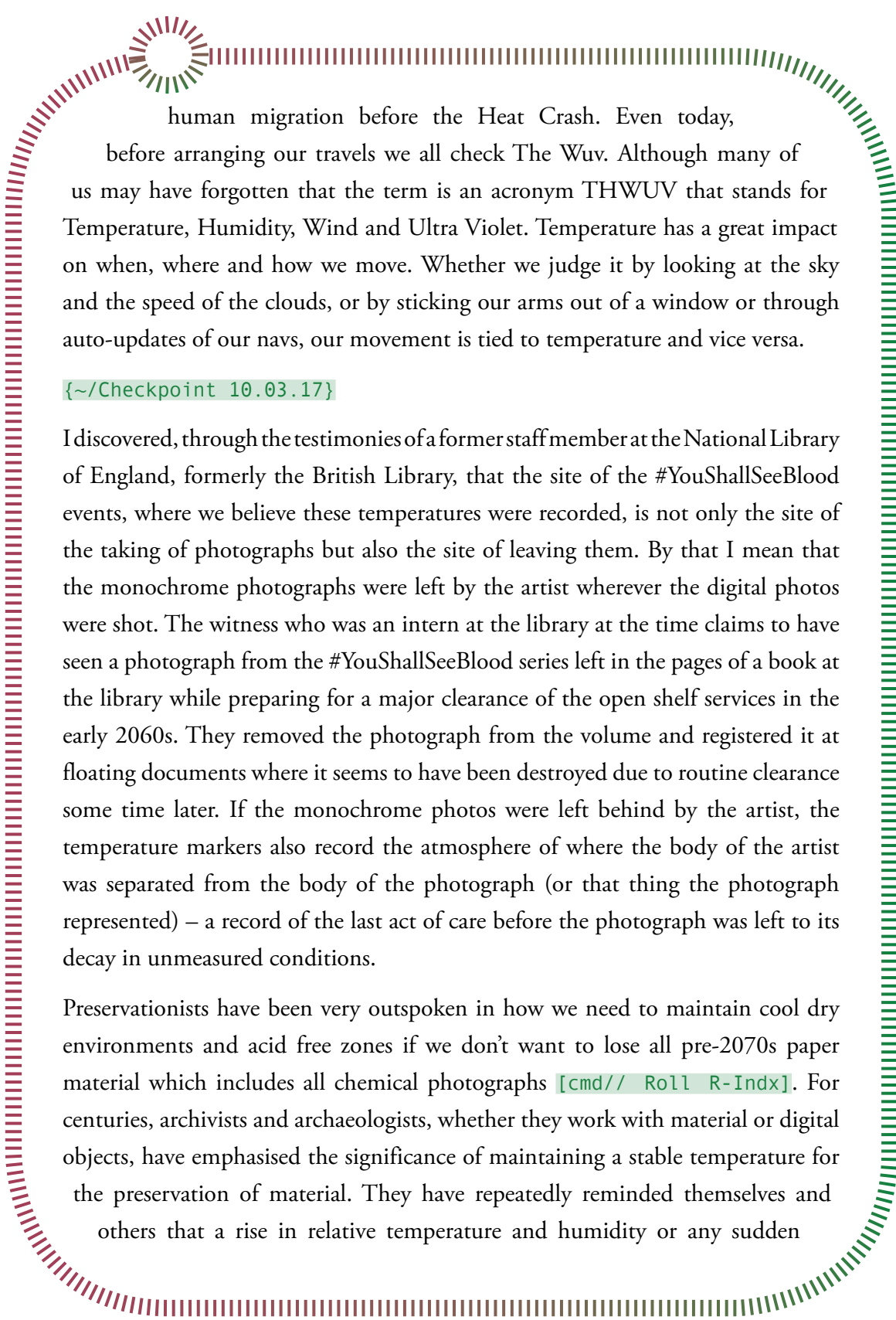
`/ melancholy2.1 / solidarity8.7 / continue without emotion supply}`

`[cmd// Punch Heart] {optn// offer visitor conversation}`

Temperature, as you might well know, is closely connected to the kinetic energy of particles of matter – that is the energy that the particles have because of their motion. In simple terms, the measurement of the average kinetic energy of the particles in an object is what we call its temperature. The faster the particles move the more kinetic energy and the higher the temperature. I am particularly interested in the temperature of the air because it records the atmosphere and the space between bodies – say for example the space between the body of the photographer and the body of the photograph in #YouShallSeeBlood. The temperature markers we have retrieved tell us of the motion in the particles of air between bodies – they tell us of the oxygen and nitrogen that make up the air and the dust that floats in the air and traps the heat. Like affect and emotion, the air temperature is situated in the space between bodies and it is by way of this air and its kinetic energy that distant bodies are connected. By way of the particles of the air, distant bodies touch each other – affecting and being affected by one another. The temperature rises and falls in this touching – it is never lost. Even though it is invisible, as motion it moves from one body to another or to the air around it – never seen but always felt.

`{~/post-prediction adjustment}`

A temperature measure is thus a translation of the motion of particles, objects or bodies. It is also closely related to the movement of bodies across and around the globe. From the seasonal migration of the animals to mass waves of

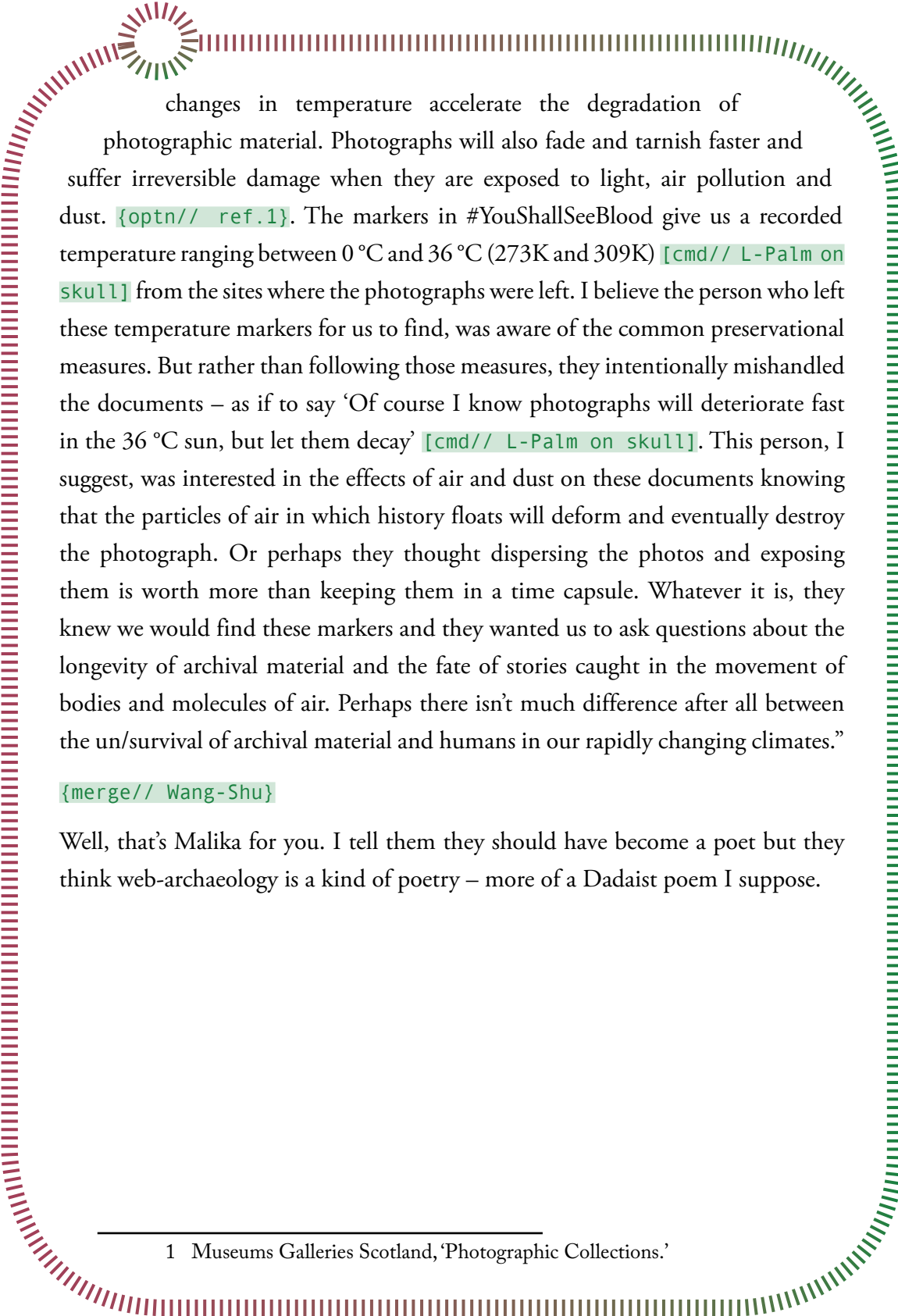


human migration before the Heat Crash. Even today, before arranging our travels we all check The Wuv. Although many of us may have forgotten that the term is an acronym THWUV that stands for Temperature, Humidity, Wind and Ultra Violet. Temperature has a great impact on when, where and how we move. Whether we judge it by looking at the sky and the speed of the clouds, or by sticking our arms out of a window or through auto-updates of our navs, our movement is tied to temperature and vice versa.

{~/Checkpoint 10.03.17}

I discovered, through the testimonies of a former staff member at the National Library of England, formerly the British Library, that the site of the #YouShallSeeBlood events, where we believe these temperatures were recorded, is not only the site of the taking of photographs but also the site of leaving them. By that I mean that the monochrome photographs were left by the artist wherever the digital photos were shot. The witness who was an intern at the library at the time claims to have seen a photograph from the #YouShallSeeBlood series left in the pages of a book at the library while preparing for a major clearance of the open shelf services in the early 2060s. They removed the photograph from the volume and registered it at floating documents where it seems to have been destroyed due to routine clearance some time later. If the monochrome photos were left behind by the artist, the temperature markers also record the atmosphere of where the body of the artist was separated from the body of the photograph (or that thing the photograph represented) – a record of the last act of care before the photograph was left to its decay in unmeasured conditions.

Preservationists have been very outspoken in how we need to maintain cool dry environments and acid free zones if we don't want to lose all pre-2070s paper material which includes all chemical photographs [cmd// Roll R-Indx]. For centuries, archivists and archaeologists, whether they work with material or digital objects, have emphasised the significance of maintaining a stable temperature for the preservation of material. They have repeatedly reminded themselves and others that a rise in relative temperature and humidity or any sudden



changes in temperature accelerate the degradation of photographic material. Photographs will also fade and tarnish faster and suffer irreversible damage when they are exposed to light, air pollution and dust. `{optn// ref.1}`. The markers in #YouShallSeeBlood give us a recorded temperature ranging between 0 °C and 36 °C (273K and 309K) `[cmd// L-Palm on skull]` from the sites where the photographs were left. I believe the person who left these temperature markers for us to find, was aware of the common preservational measures. But rather than following those measures, they intentionally mishandled the documents – as if to say ‘Of course I know photographs will deteriorate fast in the 36 °C sun, but let them decay’ `[cmd// L-Palm on skull]`. This person, I suggest, was interested in the effects of air and dust on these documents knowing that the particles of air in which history floats will deform and eventually destroy the photograph. Or perhaps they thought dispersing the photos and exposing them is worth more than keeping them in a time capsule. Whatever it is, they knew we would find these markers and they wanted us to ask questions about the longevity of archival material and the fate of stories caught in the movement of bodies and molecules of air. Perhaps there isn’t much difference after all between the un/survival of archival material and humans in our rapidly changing climates.”

`{merge// Wang-Shu}`

Well, that’s Malika for you. I tell them they should have become a poet but they think web-archaeology is a kind of poetry – more of a Dadaist poem I suppose.

1 Museums Galleries Scotland, ‘Photographic Collections.’



A School Holiday of Sorts

The Arsonist

December 1946 - Iran, Azarbaijan, Tabriz

Since the war has finished there has been chaos all over the region. It was as if the government was busy with other things up to now and suddenly had more forces to suppress domestic uprisings. Also since Stalin has pulled out the Red Army from Iran, the separatist Turks and Kurds are weakened without Soviet support. The Royal Army (the Shah's) raided Tabriz and overthrew the local separatist government led by Jafar Pishehvani in less than twenty-four hours.¹

I was back in school those days and could not get my head around the details of the situation. I knew that an American high official, a William O. Douglas, will visit Tabriz in four linear years and write of these days:

The Persian Army – the army of emancipation – was a savage army of occupation. It left a brutal mark on the people. The beards of peasants were burned, their wives and daughters raped. Houses were plundered; livestock was stolen. The army was out of control. Its mission had been liberation; but it preyed on the civilians,

1 Milani, *The Shah*, 124-128.



leaving death and destruction behind.¹

*When was I playing flute and dancing for Alexander's troops
looting Persepolis? It feels like yesterday. I am craving the grapes
from the vineyards of Persepolis and lying in the sun with my
feet in the river.*

Douglas does not seem to have heard anything about the book burnings. But of course, I remember. I was there. This time I was too young to lead the procession. Sound of rifles and screams. I was scared with every boyish bone in my body. At that time I thought I would never want to remember this incident, let alone write it. But now, many years later/before, I feel that writing it is the first step towards understanding it, not as a memory but a story, a life-long project.

There was a new headmaster in our school. He started speaking to us in Farsi, not our usual Turkish. I had no problem understanding other languages of course. The other kids looked a bit confused. 'Kids, Pishvari has escaped', he said in a voice much louder than normal, 'the offenders are defeated and the chaos is over. Pishvari left and took his language [Turkish] with him! Now we'll go together to destroy the rest of his traces.'²

1 Douglas, *Strange Lands*, 45.

2 Behrangi, *Baradaram Samad Behrangi*, 61.



The air smelt of gunpowder, burning wood and oil. All of us kids were lined up and taken to the street. We went down the narrow alleyway. I could see orange lights at the end of the alley. We reached the square. It was cold and windy and there were flames going in all directions. There is usually snow in these days. I remember the snowman we made last winter. But there was nothing this year. When we entered the square the heat from the flames turned winter into summer. 'Children from other schools were also there.' All the time we were walking towards the fire, I thought the headmaster is going to throw us all in the flames. And I was scared to death. Then I noticed it's all about the books. That they are somehow afraid of books.¹

We threw each and every one of the books into the fire. The new headmaster would give sweets to every student who threw their books into the flames. All headmasters were careful that no one hides their books, making sure they throw it in the fire. I threw my books in the fire as well²

and ate my sweet. Suddenly, I felt some kind of joy. Probably because I thought I won't have to study any more – because I have no more books – but of course the joy did not last long.

1 Behrangi, 61.

2 Behrangi, 61.

I secretly collected a pile of ash and filled both my pockets with it. When I got home I got a good beating from my mother for having ash all over my face and clothes.

2016, July

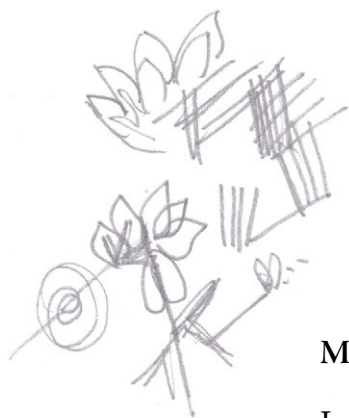
Sitting on the grass in Parliament Square, London. Churchill has his back to us. I am talking to a couple – friends of mine – from Iranian Azerbaijan and I keep questioning them to see what they remember from the book burning in Tabriz.

- Have you heard of the book burning back in the day?

- Oh, yes, of course. We burnt two big sacks of my brother's books. We were so worried that he would be arrested, my sister – may she rest in peace – threw all his books in the tanoor.¹

Brilliant idea ... I never thought of throwing books in the tanoor———But it soon turns out she's talking about the revolution time (1979-80) – not what I experienced as a child in 1946. They haven't even heard anything about the fire in '46 – did it really happen? ... I wonder ... of course it did ... I was there ...

1 Tanoor is a stone oven mainly used for baking bread.



March-April 1947 – Mahabad, Kurdistan

In Kurdistan, the army's attack went without hooliganism. They did, however, capture several Kurd activists. Since March, eight high ranking Kurd officials have been executed and last week, piles of 'Kurdish books were gathered in a square by soldiers and burned.'¹ I'm an intern at the army but am helping out the Kurds by manipulating court records.

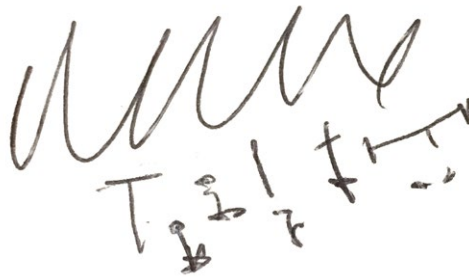
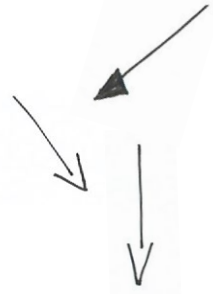
Colonel saw me jotting down notes in my notebook yesterday. I had just started to write "I was thinking of an archival practice that could demonstrate how 'memory can make history precisely by erasing it'"² He ordered me to hand over my notebook. I did. He examined it.

- Practicing your hieroglyphs?
- No sir.
- You think we have time for doodles?
- No sir.
- Then what the hell are you doodling for?
- I'm sorry sir.
- You don't want me to see you with this thing ...
ever ... again.
- Yes sir.

1 Koohi-Kamali, *Kurds in Iran*, 121.

2 Caruth, 'After the End,' 34.

He threw the notebook on the desk. Lucky I was writing in logogram but I also wonder what Colonel would have thought about the shifts in the nature of the historical archive. Or about how we can activate archives through anti-preservational acts? What would he think about a history that survives in the ashes of itself – especially as more traces of the disasters of the war are revealed. He wouldn't give a maggoty damn about it I guess. I hear the army plan to shut down the Kurdish printing press and forbid the teaching of Kurdish language.¹



1 Koohi-Kamali, *Kurds in Iran*, 121.

There are contradictions in the Arsonist's mission and approach. Those of preservation and destruction, terror and joy, *mal* and *jouissance*, intention and doubt. They burn and sometimes keep, they memorise and sometimes forget. They operate in a zone where these contradictory terms intermingle. This contradiction and intermingling is natural and, more importantly, fruitful. It is these contradictions that have lured me to follow the Arsonist's long journey and manifold experiments. Derrida also writes of the contradiction in Freud's thesis on the archive. This is what he writes, cited and annotated by Shoshana Felman:

Freud's discourse on the archive, and here is the thesis of the theses [of this book], seems thus to be divided. As does his concept of the archive. It takes two contradictory forms [— that of the preservation and simultaneously of the destruction of the archive—].... That is why we say ... *archive fever* [*mal d'archive*, fire in the archive] This contradiction is not negative, it modulates and conditions the very formation of the concept of the archive and of the concept in general.¹

The contradictions in the Arsonist's approach, echoed in *Mishandled Archive*, between preservation and destruction of the archive, are *mal* (and *jouissance*) *d'archive*. They are also Felman's *Fire in the Archive*. Wang Shu and the Arsonist offer two different but connected entry points into *Mishandled Archive*. One through the ruins of seemingly unruinable digital archives and the other through the material ashes of paper archives. They unearth preserved/destroyed fragments – there is the tension/contradiction again – with a mutual passion and illness, *mal*. This *mal* has an eye to the after, to when

1 Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 56; quoted in Felman, 'Fire in the Archive,' 57.

new pathways can be imagined. 'From the ashes comes a future, a writing of the future, 'after the end''.¹

1 Felman, 'Fire in the Archive,' 57.



Centenary of the
Unforgotten



Wang Shu

{~/Checkpoint 10.03.18}

I feel like you're ready to visit the exhibition. I'm sure you know the title already:
#YouShallSeeBlood: Centenary of the Unforgotten

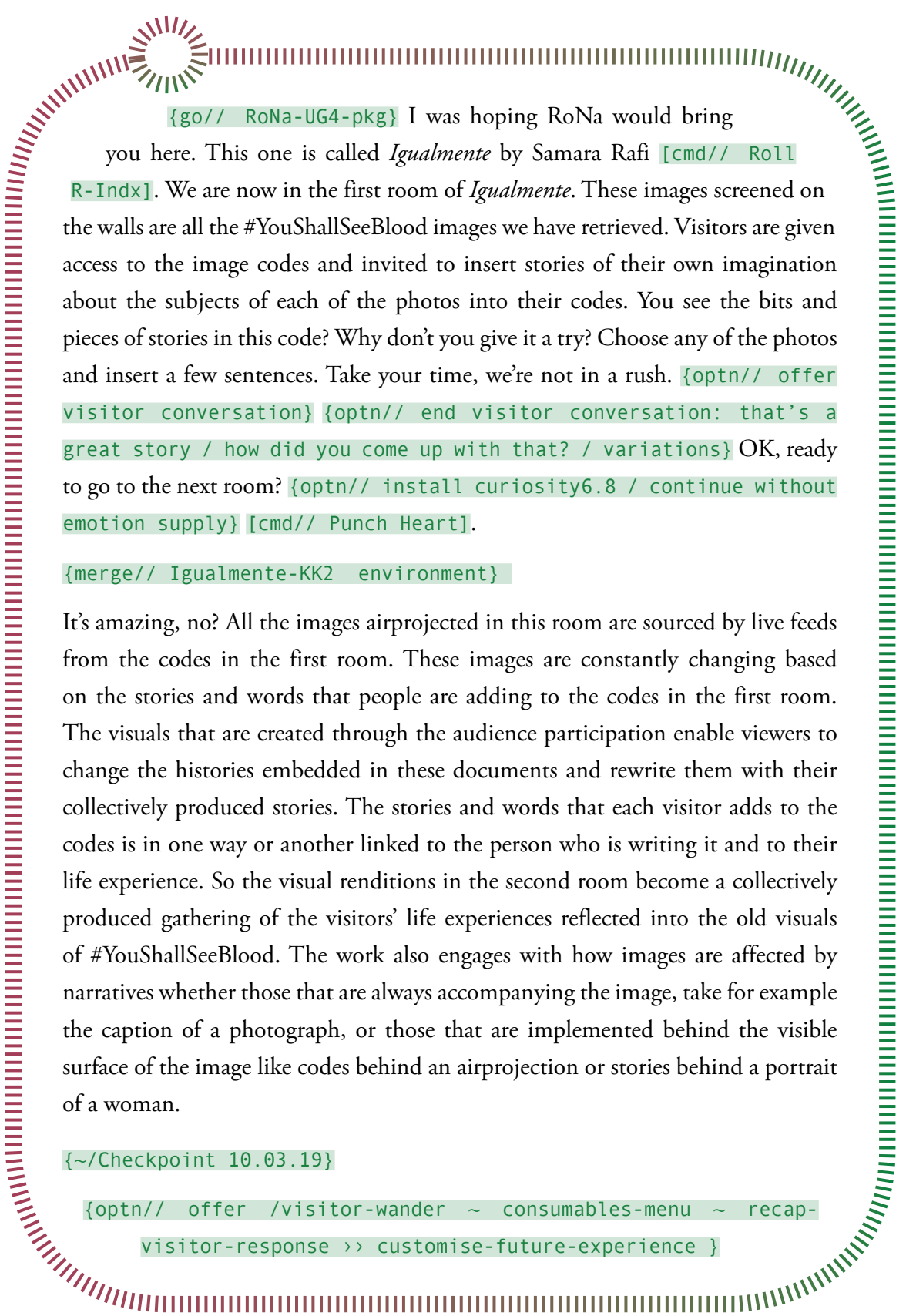
Hi RoNa, you're right on time. This is RoNa, our UTC. RoNa, this is {visitor name}. RoNa will port us to some of the highlights of the exhibition that they have picked specifically for you. {optn// offer visitor conversation} [cmd// Bend L-Thumb].

{~/RoNa-generic-intro / offer emotional add-on / customize menu / recalibrate prediction bias}

{go// RoNa-UG1-pkg} This is OYDA by Finian Tizabi. Do you remember the words Chen recovered from the remnants of #YouShallSeeBlood? Inspired by the words 'dance', 'one-year' and 'archive' which were among Chen's finds, Finian Tizabi has created OYDA, One Year Dance Archive. OYDA includes multi-platform instructions for twelve distinct folk dances from around the world. Each dance traditionally corresponds to and is performed at a specific month of the year. Visitors can volunteer to download the instructions as kinecommands on their systems and perform the dances throughout the exhibition [cmd// Roll R-Idx].

{go// RoNa-UG2-pkg} This is È=9~éÁ|süzü†*Z9 by Kian Fergusson. Fergusson has printed this #YouShallSeeBlood photo using micro-ink on canvas. The micro-ink is sampling the canvas and reflecting it in two locations by the sea in Cuba and Turkey – the two places which we have linked to the project photographs. The canvas reflection is open for public viewing every sunset on the waters of the Caribbean Sea and the Mediterranean [cmd// Roll R-Idx].

{go// RoNa-UG3-pkg} This is *The Short Long Ride* by Fay Zita. It's an immersive 360 mould on smart paper [cmd// Roll R-Idx]. It's very hard to put this into words. Put your hands on the mould to feel it.



```
{go// RoNa-UG4-pkg}
```

 I was hoping RoNa would bring you here. This one is called *Igualmente* by Samara Rafi

```
[cmd// Roll R-Indx]
```

. We are now in the first room of *Igualmente*. These images screened on the walls are all the #YouShallSeeBlood images we have retrieved. Visitors are given access to the image codes and invited to insert stories of their own imagination about the subjects of each of the photos into their codes. You see the bits and pieces of stories in this code? Why don't you give it a try? Choose any of the photos and insert a few sentences. Take your time, we're not in a rush.

```
{optn// offer visitor conversation} {optn// end visitor conversation: that's a great story / how did you come up with that? / variations}
```

 OK, ready to go to the next room?

```
{optn// install curiosity6.8 / continue without emotion supply} [cmd// Punch Heart]
```

.

```
{merge// Igualmente-KK2 environment}
```

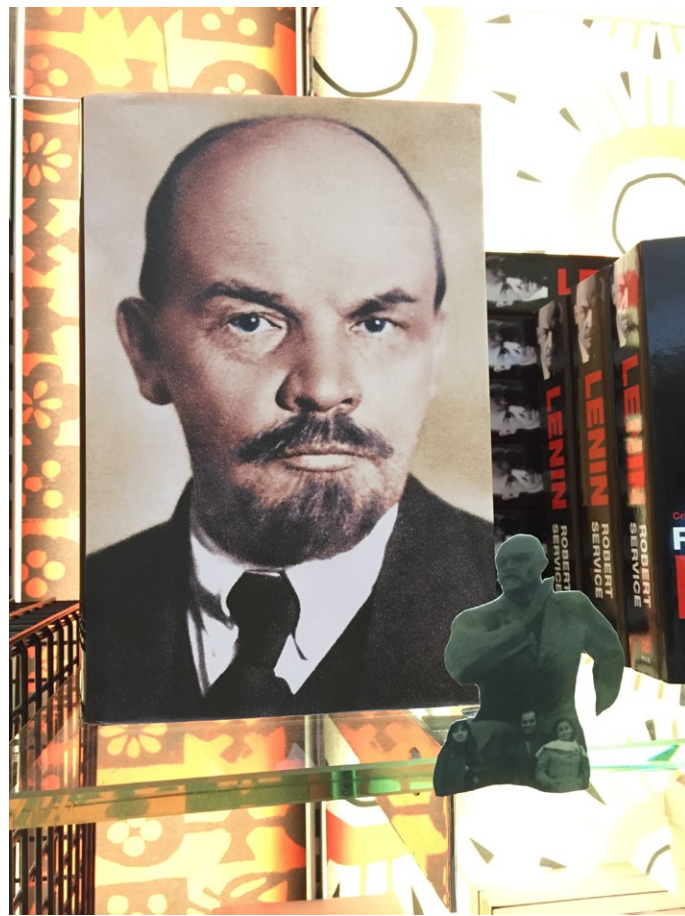
It's amazing, no? All the images airprojected in this room are sourced by live feeds from the codes in the first room. These images are constantly changing based on the stories and words that people are adding to the codes in the first room. The visuals that are created through the audience participation enable viewers to change the histories embedded in these documents and rewrite them with their collectively produced stories. The stories and words that each visitor adds to the codes is in one way or another linked to the person who is writing it and to their life experience. So the visual renditions in the second room become a collectively produced gathering of the visitors' life experiences reflected into the old visuals of #YouShallSeeBlood. The work also engages with how images are affected by narratives whether those that are always accompanying the image, take for example the caption of a photograph, or those that are implemented behind the visible surface of the image like codes behind an airprojection or stories behind a portrait of a woman.

```
{~/Checkpoint 10.03.19}
```

```
{optn// offer /visitor-wander ~ consumables-menu ~ recap-  
visitor-response >> customise-future-experience }
```

Future adaptations of Mishandled Archive return to narratives and imagining new stories. Although there are only fragments of broken images remaining in the digital ruins, it seems like stories are unavoidable even if they are in a constant state of flux, such as in the work of Samara Rafi.

Checkpoint 10.03.19, which we just arrived at, is the end of the script but it is not the end of the experience for the visitors. The rest of the experience is fully customisable based on the responses of each visitor. Each person may decide to go back, re-explore, take new routes, revisit places and times, and never finish the Multiple Reality Experience.



**A Pile of Marx. A Pile
of Lenin.**



The Arsonist

Among the things that characterize this revolutionary event, there is the fact that it has brought out – and few people in history have had this – an absolutely collective will. The collective will is a political myth with which jurists and philosophers try to analyze or to justify institutions, etc. It's a theoretical tool: nobody has ever seen the 'collective will' and, personally, I thought that the collective will was like God, like the soul, something one would never encounter. I don't know whether you agree with me, but we met in Tehran and throughout Iran, the collective will of a people.

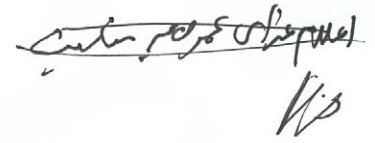
Foucault, 'Iran,' 253;

quoted in Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Foucault in Iran*,
57- 58.

1981 – Yussef Abad, Tehran, Iran

A superstitious grandmother would say “hyenas have shat on the luck of this place” (meaning the place always attracts disasters). Newspapers have started ‘announcing the firing squad execution of those suspected of sympathising with leftist groups deemed counterrevolutionary’.¹ I’ve heard they

1 Ebadi and Moaveni, *Iran Awakening*, 66.



are sending young heated Hezbollahis to attack leftist offices and burn their books.

More terrible news is pouring in from the borders with Iraq. I wonder why I always crave living in places with wars and revolts – it's an exhausting way of life. It's been a while since the Shah fled, January 79, and Khomeini arrived a little after. There has been so much violence, chaos and ambiguity. The phrase "collective will to change" has been resonating in my head for more than two years but every time I look around I wonder what exactly is happening. Uncertainty has taken over everyone I know. Perhaps there are people out there certain of what's happening – I don't know them. Several political factions are branching off into new groups and 'fighting each other over the direction of the revolution'. No one knows what is going to happen. And yesterday I was not allowed into the court without a headscarf – this was new.¹

Last night, I noticed I have been standing in my living room for what felt like two centuries.

I cocked my head sideways, scanning the books on our bookshelf, plucking out the politically objectionable titles, and tossing them into a cardboard box. I lugged the box into the

1 Ebadi and Moaveni, 66.

عاشق با سبیل و لبخند
۹۴۵۶۶۸

backyard. Negar [my daughter] watched me from behind the sliding glass door, mystified, as I made little pyramids around the periphery of the yard and then set them alight. A pile of Marx. A pile of Lenin. Sometimes I wondered whether she would retain memories of these strange times, when the adults used words like “execution” and “arrest” regularly in the kitchen, when her mother crouched in the backyard making bonfires out of books.¹

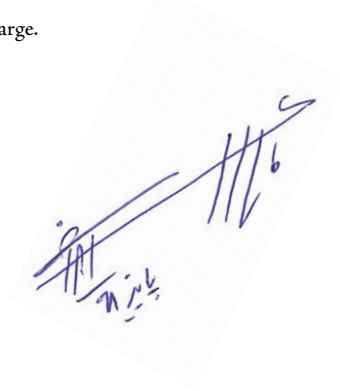
I had made a code list of all the titles I was burning and had started keeping a file of clippings from the newspapers to present to [Negar] later, when she would be old enough to demand explanations and my own memories, hopefully, would have faded. A thin whorl of smoke rose from each pile, as if I were performing some esoteric ritual. When the last volume collapsed into a small heap of ash, soot covered the shrubs and lilies in the garden, and charred pages blew around, like paper leaves.²

I collected as much of the ash as I could and kept it in a sealed jar. I labelled it پایان ۱۵ت۵۹ [The End 15T59]. “Why am I keeping clippings of newspapers?”, I suddenly thought to myself. Isn’t it true that burning is my evidence? I feel the

1 Ebadi and Moaveni, *Iran Awakening*, 66.

2 Ebadi and Moaveni, 66.

thrill of taking ownership of the disaster, of being at the heart of the event, at the liveness of burning and of history. **I** am standing here at this most ordinary and forgettable back yard and **I** am making my history and **I** have made these piles and **I** have started this fire and **I** am in charge, I am in charge, I am in charge, I am in charge, I am in charge, I am in charge.





The Unfinished Tale of the Obsessive Itinerant Women

Anahid Ravanpoor

On the Impossibility of Closure

There is a certain obsession in several translations of *The Thousand Nights and One Night* with completing and finalising the book. To ascertain that the book lives up to its title of having a *thousand and one* nights as well as an ending or conclusion. Galland, the French orientalist and archaeologist who produced the first European translation of the book, added a few stories and moved around some night breaks to “complete” the work. Because the Arabic manuscripts he was translating were “incomplete” and would break off mid-story after around 270 nights, Galland added stories he had heard elsewhere to his translation.¹ Such was the ‘Story of Aladdin and the Magic Lamp’ which he had heard from Hanna Diab, a Maronie Christian from Aleppo.² As mentioned earlier *A Thousand Tales* only had around two hundred stories spread across a thousand nights.³ So neither one of the books, *A Thousand Tales* or *The Thousand and One Nights* fulfil their titles by having either a thousand tales or a thousand and one nights. What is beautiful and must be embraced in the copies and manuscripts of *The Thousand Nights and One Night* is exactly its incompleteness and lack of an ending. The charm and effectiveness of the method is in stopping mid-story and not in finding a conclusion or moral – such as Galland’s – in which Shahrzād turns into an obedient wife and a good mother and stops telling stories altogether.⁴

The Thousand Nights and One Night is, as Borges suggests, an

1 YZ: ShaDi, the sisters who are collaborators in Mishandled Archive, are also said to hang up the phone mid-story.

2 Gauch, *Liberating Shabrazad*, xi; Mahdi and Haddawy, *The Arabian Nights*, 14; and Irwin, *The Arabian Nights*, 16-17.

3 Ibn-an-Nadīm, *The Fihrist*, 714.

4 Gauch, xiv, 103-104.

‘infinite book’.¹ ‘At home’, Borges writes, ‘I have the seventeen volumes of Burton’s version of *The Thousand and One Nights*. I know I’ll never read all of them’. This infinite book is not finished nor finishable – by either the writers or the readers. The continuation of Shahrzād’s creative strategy is in its infinitude as it seeps into and is recurrently appropriated in our current times. A continuation which is also evident when it drives Galland to collect stories (to listen to storytellers who recount what they have heard in faraway lands) or to even invent stories himself.² As Gauch rightly points out, the story of Shahrzād is ‘one of the longest works in progress ever’.³ Therefore striving to draw the finish line goes against its values of ongoing progression.

Jalal Toufic also engages with questions of infinitude regarding *The Thousand Nights and One Night*. He expresses interest in copies of the book that are missing at least one night. ‘Were I to become the editor of a future edition of *The Thousand and One Nights*’, writes Toufic, ‘[...] I would make sure that one of the so-called nights is missing, i.e., that the edition is incomplete’.⁴ Later in the same text he contradicts his fascination with the incompleteness and muses on how and when the book *can be complete*; once again confirming the irresistible obsession with finitude. The completion that Toufic imagines for *The Thousand Nights and One Night* is the reappearance of the messiah. ‘Until the worldly reappearance of *al-Qā’im* (the Resurrector)’, writes Toufic, ‘there should not be a complete edition of *The Thousand and One Nights*’.⁵ Meaning that after the reappearance of the messiah there *should be* a complete edition – one that has all the promised nights, one that comes to an end. So Shahrzād’s work

1 Borges, ‘Thousand and One Nights,’ 42. Elsewhere, on p. 58, Borges suggests that thousand nights means infinite nights and a thousand and one is to add one to infinity.

2 See Borges, ‘Thousand and One Nights,’ 45-46; where he suggests that Galland has a right to invent stories after having translated so many of them.

3 Gauch, *Liberating Shahrzād*, xviii.

4 Toufic, *Two or Three Things*, 101.

5 Toufic, 103.

in progress is complete when Mahdi (al-Qā'im), the messianic figure of Shia Islam, (re)appears.

In between legend and fact, abstraction and materiality, *Mahdi*, the twelfth Imam of Shiism also known as Imam-e Zaman ("Imam of Time") and Imam-e Qā'eb ("the Absent Imam"), is believed to return to earth at the end of time, rid it from impurity and oppression and start the rule of justice.¹ The believers of the Absent Imam, in his absence, await his worldly reappearance on a gloomy Friday evening when he will return and restore justice.² For Toufic, the reappearance of al-Qā'im is the key to finishing *The Thousand Nights and One Night*: to finish the task of writing the book ['the only one who should write the missing night that brings the actual total of nights to a thousand and one is the messiah/al-Qā'im'] and that of reading it ['only with his worldly reappearance can one read the whole book without dying'].³ Even if the-time-that-the-messiah-will-reappear sounds otherworldly and even impossible to imagine for some, Toufic's vision still seems obsessed with a compulsive thirst for bringing to end the infinitude of *The Thousand Nights and One Night*.

A Thousand Tales was the work of a collective mind. This plurality continues into our time where multitudes of translators, writers, storytellers, scholars, artists, grandmothers and children engage with Shahrzād's stories and micro-activism. In Shahrzād's creative and critical strategy, there is no need for comprehensiveness, completeness and conclusion. Just like at the community meeting in a remote village that Trinh T. Minh-ha describes in *Woman, Native, Other*.

1 It is commonly believed, among Shias, that al-Qā'im (Mahdi) has disappeared in 941CE. He is, therefore, also known as Imam-e Qā'eb ("the Absent Imam").

2 It is traditionally believed that Mahdi will reappear on a Friday.

3 Toufic, 103.

The story never stops beginning or ending. It appears headless and bottomless because it is built on differences. Its infinitude subverts every notion of completeness and its frame remains a non-totalisable one.¹

The frame of Shahrzād's story embraces and adapts itself to different eras, belief systems, societies, languages and places because of its infinitude. Her infinite legacy of transculturalism, micro-activism and slow revolution survives through many fires because it is, literally, unburnable. In its generosity, *The Thousand Nights and One Night* is as monstrous a book as Borges's *Book of Sand*: the infinite book brought from India that he dared not put to fire because 'the burning of an infinite book might likewise prove infinite and suffocate the planet with smoke.'² It is no coincidence that in Borges's story the narrator hides the infinite book 'behind the volumes of a broken set of The Thousand and One Nights'.³ Knowing that Borges, repeating all the pre-existing inaccurate research, believes that *The Thousand Nights and One Night* originated in India, is he not, then, suggesting that the infinite unburnable *Book of Sand* is the story of Shahrzād and *The Thousand Nights and One Night* itself?⁴

1 Minh-ha, *Woman Native Other*, 2.

2 Borges, *Book of Sand*, 122.

3 Borges, 121.

4 'They were first told in India, then in Persia, then in Asia Minor, and finally were written down in Arabic and compiled in Cairo' (Borges, 'Thousand and One Nights,' 38).

The one book that cannot be burnt is the stories of the two women: ShaDi, Shahrzād and Dīnāzād, Sang-havak and Arenavak, Shahrnāz and Arnavāz, Homa and Behāfarid, Hoomāg and Vārizkanā, Anāhitā and Espandārmaz. The songs, poems, rhymes, pictures and anecdotes that they have collected in the *passages* and while *passing* do not burn in fire.

Having said that, I imagine that by this point you must be thinking that you have read so much about fire, destruction, dance, resistance, micro-something, micro-another-thing, flames, history, women, literature, margins, creation, citation————that you are simply fed up and you just don't care anymore. It's ok. It happens to all of us. By this point, you might have also noticed that you don't know much, if anything, about me, YZ, the one who likes to think they have been holding your hand and taking you through these flames, histories, citations, I-spare-you-the-rest. The one who likes to imagine they go beyond at-times-annoying interventions into others' lectures and memoirs. Perhaps it's too late to tell you – or maybe you already know – but, 'I, the person in charge of the story, have decided that' you, the person walking with me, or reading (or are you listening to) this story – yes, it's all a story – will never feel fully satisfied – not because I intentionally want you to feel dissatisfied, no, of course not, it's more like an aftermath, a consequence, of me not being able to tell you more than I can tell you.¹ Or tell you things in ways other than the way I am telling you.

To make up for this dissatisfaction, or perhaps in lieu of a conclusion, 'I, the person in charge of the story, have decided' to tell you that I make tea every morning, with cardamom, and narenj (bitter orange, that is) blossoms but I don't believe that will solve your disappointment

1 Ali Smith, *Autumn*, chap. 17.

with the ambiguity of the story or its lack of a conclusion. I have also decided to tell you that I can never relate to writers who predict what I, as a reader, would feel. I don't appreciate them predicting my emotions and when someone says to me "at this point you must feel disappointed, fed up or whatever" I doubt if I am disappointed, fed up or whatever. I therefore apologise for predicting your disappointments and dissatisfactions.

I have also decided to tell you that I wear see-through black nylon stockings – *Parisians* – almost always with a hole running down, ripping a good few centimetres and revealing my skin until it is constrained by a blob of light pink nail polish.

Then I decided to finish with a quotation from someone else that would summarise everything everyone has said so far in this volume. A blank page with only one quotation in the middle, as if it's the beginning of a book. If I had done that, this would be the quotation:

Dance, like energy, never disappears; it is simply transformed.¹

But instead, I decided to pose this question to you which has been bugging me for quite some time: "In what temperature do humans rot?"

If that is not enough, in lieu of a conclusion, I can tell you that my children will also have weak eyes – it's only a matter of months, or years. It runs in the family. Hard of vision. Strong in smell. Prone to migraine. Good memory. Not photographic but enough to remember that the kids' blankets are teal and lime and there are two chairs in the room upstairs and it goes lentils, dahl, red rice and chickpeas from left to right on the kitchen shelf. I sometimes take my glasses off – I just can't stand their weight when the migraine hits. When I take my glasses off everything becomes a blur. There is no difference between chickpeas and red rice other than in my memory. I always wonder what happens if someone attacks me

1 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 81.

and I'm not wearing my glasses. I think I'm mentally prepared for it but the thought of it, I think, has given me this recurring dream: I'm sitting alone in a dark cell, sometimes there is a slimy metal sink, sometimes nothing. The door opens, three men enter. They handcuff me from the back. One of them comes close to my face, he has hair coming out of his nostrils. He takes off my glasses and his nasal hair disappears. He puts the glasses on the sheet. I remember that the sheet has my initials sewn into it but I cannot see. I know there is a green bag, that I have sewn, on my eight o'clock, a carved poem on the wall, on my one o'clock, and maybe a sink on my eleven o'clock. They take me out, through a corridor that I know by heart, grey walls, two clinical white lights on each side. The signs on the three closely adjacent doors on the left – which I know from memory – read:

Telecommunication

Archive

Rosewater

(in the dream I know what that means).

Then it's the courtyard. Strong sun. I am put in a row of blindfolded people. I am the only one without a blindfold who can see the firing squad and yet I cannot see without my glasses and that stresses me out more than knowing that I am going to die. I panic. A see-through truck passes by. A coffin decorated with flowers in the front and a man with an apron preparing an elegant meal in the back. A table is set for ten people on the back of the truck with plates, bowls, candelabras and flickering candles. The cook spots me in the line and smiles. The truck moves on. From this moment, it's different every time. This last time, I managed to make, or better say fake, eye contact with my killer and make him start dancing. Right arm went up towards the sky with a swirl. Left arm went diagonally down. Eyes followed each arm. Then a crazy chest and back move as if something was trying to get out of his chest. I heard nine shots and a smell of gunpowder that I remembered from the streets of Belgrade. I felt the

others fall on the floor. But my killer kept dancing, and in my head I knew his every move as if I had watched it before, in my conscious life perhaps: his right leg shoots out like an arrow, the rest of his body pushes to the right. His every move slipped through my eyes – each move always already a vanishing point – but they never vanished from my mind. Never lost. Never disappeared.

But it still wasn't over.

Tara Fatehi Irani,
*Through a Mishandled Archive*¹

1 Fatehi Irani, *Through a Mishandled Archive*, 5-9.



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